THE BRITISH CHURCH IN 2050

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Category: Church: UK

Over the next few weeks, I plan to write a short series of blog posts on the state of Christianity worldwide in the year 2050. I write as someone who has travelled widely and who is a keen student of church history; beyond that I don't claim to any authority or expertise in futurology. Please feel free to disagree completely with my predictions, which may well be completely inaccurate. The first post in this series concerns the church in the UK and by extension, the rest of the Western world.

The Environment for the Church in 2050

The hostility to religious faith that we experience today will continue to grow. While the church won't be actively persecuted by the state, many of the privileges that we take for granted today will have been stripped away. "Promotion of religion" will no longer be accepted as a charitable objective and many churches and Christian charities will no longer benefit from gift-aid or other tax-exempt donation schemes. A general revamp of the House of Lords will see the bishops removed from the legislature. Collaborations between officialdom and religion in the form of faith-based schools and hospital chaplaincies will no longer exist. There will still be some inoffensive vestiges of religious expressions at some official functions, but these will be multi-faith and not specifically Christian.

The Church in 2050

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Broadly speaking, Christianity will split into two wings. There will be the publicly acceptable church which offers no real challenge to the prevailing culture, but which provides a dose of 'spirituality' for those that want it. Evangelical protestants and Roman Catholics will offer a form of Christianity which confronts the spirit of the age and as a result they will be considered as socially unacceptable by the majority of people. The Anglican church will attempt to straddle the two broad tendencies in the Church, but may find itself unable to do so and will face a major schism.

The decline in church numbers will place many Christian institutions at risk. It will simply not be possible for the current number of christian charities, seminaries, colleges and mission agencies (I'll have more to say about mission agencies in a later post) to continue. Training for Christian ministry will shift from an expensive and inflexible residential based model to more informal models such as those offered by Porterbrook and St. Mellitus.

Declining numbers and increasingly onerous legislation will mean that many congregationsÂ will not be able to afford their own building. Equally, it will no longer be possible to use official buildings such as schools for religious meetings. Most cities will have one or two large churches, but the majority of Christians will meet in small groups based in homes.

The one exception to theseÂ trends will be found in the Asian and African diaspora churches. However, limits on immigration into the UK willÂ cut off the supply of first generation people while

second and third generation settlers will turn their backs on the church. By 2050, the diaspora churches will be in decline, but not as precipitately as the traditional British churches.

The situation will be broadly similar in Continental Europe, North America and Australasia.

I admit that this is a bleak picture and I hope that I've got it all wrong. However, this should not be taken to suggest that I have a lack of faith in God or in the future of the Church. The Western world represents a small percentage of the world's population and later posts will indicate that I see a bright future for the church as a whole.Â Some people might want to argue that God would not allow the church to decline like this, but he has done so in the past (look at North Africa) and I don't see why we should be considered immune.

What are your thoughts - comments below!