THE BBC AND THE CHURCH

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In which I suggest that two institutions which are dear to me are facing some massive challenges with an ostrich like attention to problems.
Category: Church: UK

It seems that hardly a week goes by without someone asking me to sign a petition to save the BBC. Apparently, if I don't append my electronic signature to some website all of the BBC's radio and TV channels will come to a swift demise and I won't be able to watch Strictly Come Dancing anymore.

Now, I like the BBC; I think it provides a superb service. I watch their news bulletins, listen to the radio, get hooked on Strictly and generally think that Only Connect is the best thing that has ever been on television. The BBC is a good thing, but...

There is increasing evidence that sections of the population are unwilling to pay the licence fee which funds the BBC. Add to this the rise of subscription services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime and it would appear that the BBC's funding model is in danger. The petitions that I get asked to sign generally call on the government to do something to support the BBC, but what exactly can the government do if people move away from the licence fee in droves? Compulsion won't work and paying for broadcasting out of income tax has all sorts of difficult connotations.

Society is changing very rapidly and if the BBC is to survive in anything like its current form, it will need to find a new way to raise the revenue that it needs. This will require far more flexibility from government and the BBC's supporters than I have so far seen.

Which brings me to the church. The excellent publication, Christianity in its Global Context, points out that Christianity is in a period of long-term decline in this part of the world. The historian, Andrew Walls, suggests that this decline is actually a cyclical pattern in the history of world Christianity, which grows from the periphery, while shrinking at the centre. In other words, the church in England is faced with a multigenerational, and potentially global perfect storm.

Like the BBC, the Church is facing huge challenges caused by long-term trends and yesterday's solutions are unlikely to meet the needs of tomorrow. I don't have a solution for either the BBC or the long term health of the church in the UK - I wish I did. However, I am convinced that until we start to get realistic about the situation we are facing, we won't find a way to move forward. Refusal to get to grips with the realities of the present challenges are the biggest problems facing both the church and the Beeb.

A serious request for help: if anyone knows of a book about the future of the church in the UK which seriously gets to grips with Andrew Walls work on the expansion of Christianity, I'd love to know about it.Â

By the way, you can read my thoughts about online petitions here (if you can't be bothered to follow the link, the quick answer is that I won't sign them).