

Progressive Religion May Be Dying But the Gospel Is Thriving

The headline was stark and unnerving: “‘Religion Is Dying’: Same-Sex Blessings Allowed but Is It Too Little Too Late for the Church’s Shaky Future?” But was it a true and accurate statement? Is “religion”—meaning the Christian religion—dying worldwide? And is the Church’s only hope the embracing of same-sex “marriage” and other “progressive” theological positions?

Actually, *true religion*—meaning a vibrant, Jesus-centered, biblically based, compassion-filled, Spirit-empowered, no-compromise expression of the Christian faith—is thriving worldwide. In stark contrast *manmade religion*—meaning a me-centered, rationally based, (per)version of the faith that substitutes affirmation for transformation—is dying worldwide.

In short, the headline has turned things upside down.

As for the quote in the headline, it was excerpted from this unattributed post on Twitter (now X): “Too little too late. Now that religion is dying, they want to bless us.”

To be sure, the Church of England seems to be dying.

Already in 2013, an article on the Conversation website began with these ominous words:

“Like an Old Testament prophet telling the Israelites that they were doomed, Lord Carey has been warning Anglicans for years of their possible annihilation. The Church is ‘one generation away from extinction,’ he declares. The reality is less dramatic, but the story is not altogether wrong.

“Young adults in Britain are far less likely than their

parents and grandparents to have a religious identity. The Church of England in particular has been squeezed hard by the trend away from religion. This is well illustrated by the graphic below which shows religious affiliation by year of birth. In the oldest group polled, one in two identified as members of the Church of England—among the youngest that figure falls to one in 20.”

What a precipitous decline! And that was in 2013.

More recently, as reported by Church Times in 2022, “The Church of England faces extinction within 40 years because the faith it proclaims is not ‘contagious’ enough, a new study reports.

“The study was compiled by Dr. John Hayward, a mathematician at the University of South Wales and the founder of the church-growth modelling site. He analyzed data from 13 denominations to calculate their R-rate—a technique more usually associated with calculating the spread of disease.

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“For a virus such as Covid-19, an R number of more than one indicates that the disease is spreading rapidly, while an R-rate of less than one points to its dying out. Dr. Hayward has now applied the same model to church attendance.”

Based on this model, the future of the Church of England is bleak. “Extinction” is a very strong word.

But this is not because the Church of England became too progressive too late.

It is the precise opposite. The decline is largely *because* the Church departed from its biblical and historic roots, becoming like the world in order to win the world. This is always a

counsel of despair.

In stark contrast, and from a global perspective, a 2015 report stated that “one quarter of the two billion Christians in the world are Pentecostal or charismatic. Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religion in the world.”

And note carefully: the report did not say that it was not just *the fastest growing branch of Christianity* but rather the *fastest growing religion* in the world. This has actually been the case for decades.

That’s why a 2020 study spoke of “the unprecedented numerical growth of the Spirit-Empowered Church” (another way of describing the Pentecostal-Charismatic movement), offering these salient points:

- From 1900-2020, Spirit-Empowered Christianity grew at nearly four times the growth rate of both Christianity and the world’s population;
- Currently, Spirit-Empowered believers comprise one quarter of the entire Christian community, which is expected to grow to one third by the year 2050;
- Asia and Oceania experienced the most rapid growth of Spirit-Empowered Christianity. However, the Spirit-Empowered population in Africa is expected to grow more quickly within the next 30 years;
- Afghanistan and Cambodia, where Christianity remains relatively new, are the countries currently experiencing the fastest upsurge in Spirit-Empowered Christianity

And what do these church movements have in common, aside from their emphasis on encountering God in the power of the Spirit? They all tend to hold to traditional biblical values when it comes to sexuality and marriage. Put another way, they are the opposite of “progressive.”

So, go ahead and do the math.

In England, over 2,000 churches have closed in the last decade, with a high percentage of them being Church of England congregations. Progressive religion is dying indeed.

In contrast, around the world, a conservative, Bible-based, Spirit-empowered faith is growing so quickly that the big problem is how to disciple and ground all the new converts.

In sum, the “religion” that tries to bring the standards of God down to accommodate people is dying. The “religion” that, through the cross and by God’s grace, seeks to bring people up to the standards of His Word, is thriving.

This doesn’t mean that every Anglican church is about to shut down, nor does it mean that every Pentecostal-charismatic church is exploding in numbers. But it does tell us which “tree” is alive and healthy and which tree is dying.

To repeat, go ahead and do the math. {eoa}

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