

# *Ten Besetting Plagues of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church*

This is my final piece on 'What's Wrong with Contemporary Evangelical Christianity'. In obedience to Christ's command I have moved on – one must leave the dead to bury the dead (Matt 8:22). I probably should have moved on years ago, but I lacked both conviction and the courage to do so! If Scripture is to be believed, better days are just around the corner. God's word assures us that the whole world will in due course come to Christ – at least formally – for the Earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Hab 2:14). The big picture is what is missing for most Christians I've encountered. I'll attempt to present it by drawing attention to what I perceive to be wrong!

## **Powerless(ness)**

First, the contemporary Church is powerless. It is lacking in vitality & strength because the Spirit of God is missing from its midst. Scripture tells us, 'Where the Spirit is, there is power' (2Cor 3:17). That power manifests itself in the way the Church impacts the surrounding culture. One said well, 'the culture is the Church's report card!' If that's true, the Church is in a very bad way indeed. It would seem to be salt that has lost its saltiness & a light hidden under a barrel (Matt 5:15). As such it was condemned implicitly by Jesus who said, 'it is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men.' The very best they aspire to achieve is the renovation of one or two souls among the few folks who continue to attend weekly Church meetings. They may seek to reform the manners & habits of individuals who get plugged in to a 'Christianity Explored' course but the power to transform culture and to 'turn the world upside down' (Acts 17:6) is plainly absent. The Holy Spirit has substantially withdrawn from the scene due to the failure of the 'priesthood' to repent. We'll see just where the points of departure have occurred as we drill down into the prevailing 'evangelical culture'. Alas, the sheep are wont to hear comfortable things in much the same way as they were in Jeremiah's day. They are wont to believe that nothing substantial or fundamental is amiss. Just a few remedial tablets & light medicine is required, perhaps, they suppose. But we shall see that a heart transplant is required to cut out the cancer & provide for new cellular life to flourish.

*"An astonishing and horrible thing has been committed in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own power; and My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?" (Jer 5:31)*

## **Polytheism & Postmodernism**

One significant difference between the contemporary Church & the First century Church concerns its accommodation of competing worldviews. The ancient world was polytheistic and could absorb every new manifestation of religion. Christianity represented just another outlook. All that was required of every citizen within the Roman empire was a token expression of allegiance to Caesar undertaken annually. This was accomplished publicly by the burning of incense and the proclamation that 'Caesar is Lord.' But the Christians of that era refused to comply and instead became famous for their own counterclaim: 'Jesus is Lord' (1Cor 12:3). Paradoxically, the early Christians became known for their 'atheism' – i.e. they were unwilling to countenance the claim to deity of any other competitor. God, the Creator, and His Christ were to be exclusively honoured and hallowed by the masses. There was to be no allowance for the sensibilities of adherents to other 'faiths.' Alas, today's Christian church leaders are content to settle for a place at the table in their disputations. Their minimal ambition is 'to present the gospel' in the context of respect for the religious sensibilities of their attendees. Christianity is 'explored'; curiosity is met with a 'Just Looking' course. There is a gospel that appeals to the supposed

religious neutrality of the audience. Their concern is to assuage the hackles of their listeners who might otherwise hear themselves being commanded to repent (Acts 17:30). But the complaint of the politically correct masses shouting from the roof-tops, "Bigot!" cuts no ice with true believers. They have come to believe that 'Jesus is THE way, THE truth and THE life. It logically follows that all other voices are 'thieves and robbers' (Jn 10:8). The honest business of true disciples of Christ is to, 'have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather to expose them.' (Eph 5:11). Real Christianity wants more than a mere seat at the table. The God it proclaims is 'the Ruler of the kings of the Earth (Rev 1:5) who owns all things – including the table!

In order to retain an air of acceptance within the culture, ALL competing worldviews have necessarily succumbed to the asphyxiating atmosphere of 'Postmodernism'. The contemporary evangelical constituency has been no better! In the closing decade of the last century, Don Carson wrote an important book drawing attention to the philosophical worldview of Postmodernism which now holds sway in vast swathes of the west. Accordingly, truth is subjective and cannot be objectively transmitted from person to person. Something, it is claimed, is always lost in translation. Every reading of a text is a misreading! Because of the prevalence of this worldview throughout the culture, we are conditioned to believe that religious truth is meaningful (even true!) only for the person expressing it but not objectively and universally true for all hearers, etc. The effect of such teaching is to silence every 'religious' narrative. Students quickly learn – if only by osmosis – that religious truth is merely 'true for you'. Such nonsense is known by another name: *relativism*. Breaking through the barrier of unbelief suddenly became a thousand times harder. Hence, the catchy title of Carson's book – the Gaggling of God! Certainty is shunned in such company. Advocates of Postmodernism can be easily taunted, however. When once I was reprimanded, by an intelligent man, for expressing an issue with conviction, I was told, "You cannot be certain!" I enquired back, "Are you sure about that?"

Truth by nature is antithetical. We go to school to learn how to reason correctly and to marshal our thoughts and ideas without confusion or contradiction, etc. Postmodernism denies such a possibility. Tragically, the same muddled mindset exists within the Church. Because of it, we are hamstrung and condemned to sectarianism – i.e. the idea that there are a range of plausible versions of truth out there from which we may choose as if the various 'Christian' alternatives were part of a smorgasbord of orthodoxy. The sorry consequence of all of this is polytheism in the Churches. This may sound severe, but it is the harsh reality of where we've sunk to. Let's briefly review. The Churches are powerless; they've adopted a polytheistic creed that grants respectability to various incompatible and contradictory religious claims. They do not regard Biblical truth as universal, exclusive or antithetical. But Jesus said, 'He is not for Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me scatters' (Lu 11:23). Again, Isaiah warns us clearly that, 'To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.' (Is 8:20)

### **Pragmatism**

In capitulating to the political pressure applied to every citizen via mass media and mass (governmental) education, Christian leaders have behaved pragmatically. That is, having felt trapped, with their backs up against the wall, they have supposed that the way forward is via the path of least resistance. They content themselves with inviting one or two soft-minded acquaintances to pursue 'friendship-evangelism' which might entail a collective meal and a guest speaker urging them to consider how much Jesus might mend their broken lives if they would but open up their hearts to Him, etc.

But the god they unwittingly peddle is a god of their own fickle imaginations. A potato-head God who must conform to their preferred ideas of what they think god should be like! No wonder contemporary Churches downplay the doctrine of special creation – that the one true and living God created the whole universe in just six twenty-four hours a few thousand years ago. The churches' failure to publish loudly

and clearly Creation, Fall and universal Flood has robbed it of any metaphysical power. Its message is consequently existential and truncated. It desperately covets respectability and acceptance within the mainstream culture. For much the same reason, the Churches are antinomian – choosing to deny or suppress any reference to God’s moral Laws. Time and time again sermons are preached on how to be reconciled through faith in Christ while the knowledge of sin (transgression of God’s holy Law) is all but silenced. Ask yourself this testing question: when did you last hear a sermon warning of Hell for those who violate the terms of God’s holy covenant? Jonathan Edward’s famous message, ‘Sinners in the hands of an angry God’ would get most ministers dismissed today! Dr Voddie Baucham draws quaint attention to this problem whilst parodying the contemporary Church’s love affair with the Eleventh Commandment – *‘Thou shalt be nice!’*

### **Pessimillennialism**

One of the most paralysing features of contemporary evangelicalism is its eschatology. It’s still very much in fashion to downplay the importance of the future implications one’s theology, but undoubtedly, today’s leading lights tend to divide into one of two camps. **First**, the dispensationalists who just cannot get past the idea that prophecies concerning the great tribulation, the abomination that causes desolation and the antichrist were in large measure fulfilled in AD70 with the Destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Rome. The Olivet discourse of Matthew 24, Luke 19 and Mark 13, contrary to widespread understanding still, is to be comprehended preteristically in accordance with the best principles of hermeneutics – the science of how to interpret Scripture. Scripture must interpret Scripture! The key to understanding NT prophecy lies in an acquaintance with the OT texts where similar language and vocabulary are routinely employed to signify divine judgement, etc. Alas, boatloads of believers persist in associating the language of cosmic disturbances (Sun, Moon & stars falling from the sky, etc) with the future Second Coming of Christ. They compound their mistakes by imagining that Jesus might return imminently!

Such an insistence that AD70 was not to the fore in Jesus’ teaching and the NT epistles in general – including the Book of Revelation – blinds their minds to the otherwise obvious and crucial motif found abundantly throughout Scripture: that God’s kingdom was inaugurated by Christ at His incarnation and will gradually displace all unconstitutional rule and power throughout the Earth in these ‘last days’ in which we find ourselves today. The Bible is positively brimming full with hope and anticipation for ‘the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ!’ (Rev 11:15). Because of this conflation of AD70 with the second coming, the prevailing assumption is that the surrounding culture must deteriorate, with Christ’s kingdom coming only subsequent to His actual return at which moment Jesus will deal a knock-out blow to His enemies. But the model prayer says otherwise: ‘Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; ...deliver us from evil for Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory NOW and forever. The parables of Jesus, not to mention His explicit promise that the gates of Hell will not prevail, compellingly make the case for Christ’s kingdom steadily expanding as is plainly taught by Daniel - “But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth” (2:35).

To compound this exegetical error, a **Second** more brutal error has gained a strangle-hold over vast swathes of Christendom. This error, recognising the fact that the churches are under the cosh and that humanism & atheism are flourishing (where decades ago Christian civilisation was in the ascendancy) teaches that Christ’s victory is manifest by and through its defeat! They pillage their motif, of course, from Christ’s cross work in which His death & suffering brought life & resurrection power to realisation. Alas, when all is said and done, their preferred interpretation of history provides them with a ready-made excuse for the general dereliction of Christian civilisation we have witnessed take place

throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the western world. To make their point further, several advocates of such pessimistic amillennialism invent a sharp distinction between the material world of culture (science, technology, politics, etc) and the spiritual realm where Christ's kingdom is actually located. A sort of 'Two kingdoms' theology emerges which is tantamount to Gnosticism. John Frame has helpfully debunked such notions in his book 'Escondido Theology'. The NT is clear enough; Jesus is revealed as 'the Ruler of the kings of the earth' (Rev 1:5). Elsewhere He is described as King of kings and Lord of lords (1Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14 & Rev 19:16).

## **Pietism**

Let's deal next with an attendant feature of their defeatist outlook. Contemporary evangelicalism is pietistic to the core! It is hard to know just where to start unpacking this error and again, I am indebted to principled Theonomists & faithful church historians for drawing attention to this movement's development. Pietism is the narrowing down of the application of Scripture to the personal realm. We'll consider how Pietism manifests itself below. But for now, let's ask ourselves whether the God of Scripture cares how human societies manage crime. He does? Bravo! How do we know? Well, the OT is brimming full of (i) principles of jurisprudence (Deuteronomy) (ii) examples of God's judgement on social wickedness (Genesis, Joshua, Jonah, etc) (iii) prophets indicting kings & nations for their failure to prosecute God's Law in their nations (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Isaiah, Daniel & Joel, etc). But even in the NT, St Paul exhorts Timothy to recognise the proper use of God's Law against criminal elements in society. There he writes,

*'But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.'* (1Tim 1:8-11)

Notice that it is not so much sin but crime which Paul highlights in these verses! And there is not a hint of any adjustment of the OT penal sanctions. Most of the crimes listed here carry a capital sanction. Elsewhere in the NT we're reliably told that every infringement of God's ordinance carried a 'just reward' (Heb 2:3). How could they be altered? The equity (justice) arises from God's own character which James tells us is steadfast, showing 'no variation nor shadow of turning' (Ja 1:17). For this reason, Jesus, (anticipating our day!) declared,

*'Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfil. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven'* (Matt 5:17-19).

Wherefore, authentic Christianity recognises its obligation to publish God's commandments and, moreover, to indict public institutions ordained by God for their failure to legislate according to the general equity of God's Law. The contemporary Christian Church has singularly failed in this respect! Throughout history, the ecclesiastical branch of God's kingdom has called to account the judicial branch of that same kingdom. The threefold spheres of life (church, family & state) are each covenantally constrained to operate collaboratively under God. They are mutually dependent on and agreeable to

one another just like the three persons of the Godhead. When the magistracy fails to impugn crime OR when that same branch of the civil authority abuses its God-given trust (by requiring what God prohibits OR by prohibiting what God commands) civil disobedience is required! This is scripturally undertaken by what the Reformers termed 'a lesser magistrate' interposing on behalf of a tyrannised individual or party.

We referenced above how the primary focus in the contemporary Church scene is 'me, myself and I'. That is to say, the churchianity that we're invited to embrace seeks to enhance our PERSONAL spiritual experience. Sermons abound on how to dispense with ungodly attitudes and practices and to adopt a more 'spiritual' approach to one's lifestyle. Jesus is our religious guru who, if we learn to follow Him, will transform the chaos and pain of our 'past-life' into 'trophies of grace'. Now, I don't doubt that following real personal conversion the life of God's Spirit will, over the course of a lifetime, gradually sanctify our being and move us towards sinless perfection in all we think & do. But that is not the exclusive domain of God's kingdom interests. Today, 'Jesus is Lord of all' means merely, "He's lord of ALL OF MY HEART!" Such a notion of His actual sovereignty is a travesty of truth. What most Christians fail to comprehend – even when it is underlined and highlighted! – is that ALL ACTIVITY IS RELIGIOUS! Someone has well said, 'The Bible is authoritative on everything that its addresses; and it speaks about everything!' It is the insipid & bewitching nature of pietism that prevents us from perceiving God's jurisdiction over all things. This leads us to ...

### **Platonism**

The contemporary Church has been poisoned by a dualistic mind-set which is essentially Greek in origin and character. Accordingly, it regiments its understanding of human life & experience in terms of two broad categories. Francis Schaeffer identified them as (i) upper storey & (ii) lower storey. The lower storey comprises the ordinary mundane stuff of life: shopping, work, engineering, mathematics, hygiene, cooking, etc. The upper storey comprises religious / spiritual activities – namely, preaching, reading Scripture, worship, evangelism, Church business, etc. But such a dichotomy is artificial and certainly not Biblical. God created all things and made them good and for His own glory. Therefore, says Paul, 'So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.' (1Cor 10:31). Luther was famously asked, 'What would you do if you knew Jesus was coming back tomorrow?' His response: 'I'd plant a tree!!' By saying so he was rebutting the platonic paradigm that prevailed generally even back then – 500 years ago!

My own academic area of (relative) expertise is Science. Let me illustrate the same necessary corrective to our thinking from that subject. Whilst the Bible is not primarily a textbook on Science, it does in fact present us with a metaphysical framework which we ignore at our peril. Scripture teaches us for example (i) recent *fiat* creation of the entire cosmos (Gen 1:1; Ex 20:11); (ii) mankind's Fall into sin and the subsequent inauguration of death & decay (Gen 3 & Rom 5); (iii) the recent catastrophic destruction of the earth by water (Gen 6); (iv) the recent sudden creation of human languages (Gen 11); the re-population of the earth & rapid speciation of newly formed habitats in the post-Flood world; (v) the provision of God's promise to warrant the invocation of the inductive principle, basic to all scientific experimentation and (vi) the implication found within the Dominion mandate (Gen 1:28) to pioneer new technologies & Science itself in order to bring all things under the feet of man as God's vicegerent in Christ (Ps 8: 6-8). Paul warns us of 'Science falsely so called' (1Tim 6:20). Cornelius Van Til laboured hard to reassert a Biblical philosophy of factuality. Accordingly, we only perceive things rightly when our thinking is analogous to God's thinking. That occurs only if we bring every thought captive to Christ – i.e. the Word of God (2 Cor 10:4). When the Scriptures properly illuminate our thinking, the psalmist's dictum is fulfilled: 'in your light we see light.' (Ps 36:9)

The most notable consequence of all that we have been thinking about is this – the gradual loss of Christian culture in the public square and the gradual rise and expansion of godless, humanistic ideology in its place. Christians are beginning to wake up. They will in due course finally acknowledge their compromise and recognise that for too long they have been willing to hear easy, pleasant ‘existential’ preaching that has ‘healed only slightly the hurt of My people saying, ‘Peace, peace, when there is no peace.’ (Jer 8:11; Ez 13:16). As I write, we are witnessing an avalanche of hatred against our precious Christian traditions. Church leaders are both fearful and/or clueless. How desperately we need a constituency of saints who, ‘like the children of Issachar who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.’ (1Chr 12:32). Today, a Christian doctor will lose his job for refusing to address a bearded man as a woman, a bakery will be taken to the high court for refusing to promote ‘gay marriage’; a teacher risks formal discipline for daring to suggest that men are stronger than women or that Darwinism isn’t universally endorsed throughout the Scientific establishment! It is already illegal to home-school one’s children in Germany; the ever-encroaching influence of the State into more and more aspects of our lives presents a dystopian prospect for true Christians. Alas, most Christians can’t even bring themselves to support Brexit!

### **Phariseeism**

With the gradual erosion of true spirituality, a surrogate theology has emerged which today dominates the local Church landscape. This form of religiosity gathers together weekly (typically once on a Sunday with a sort of ‘cell group’ mid-week) and seeks to cultivate ‘Christian community’ through shared existential activities, etc. Jesus identified the key features of the leadership: (a) they lay heavy burdens on attendees (23:4); (b) they project themselves as important (indispensable?) spiritual facilitators (23:5-7); (c) they set themselves up as an anointed priesthood and glory in themselves as ‘pillars’ in the Church (23:8-12); they resist correction – especially concerning their own warped understanding of the kingdom of God. Unwittingly, they bar themselves and the sheep they’re supposed to be guiding from truly entering God’s kingdom (23:13-14); their over-arching goal is numerical expansion of their local empires. They employ all sorts of subtlety & schemes to sneak up upon unsuspecting ‘gospel fodder’ (23:15); they talk casually of serious matters and irreverently pursue their own preferred forms of worship (23:16-22); they attach excessive weight of importance to private scruples and yet neglect to advocate for justice and righteousness in the public square (23:23); they treat non-attendees at the local Church as if they had ‘blasphemed’ against the Holy Spirit and then pronounce censoriously against anyone who dares to criticise their hegemony over the flock (23:24); they pretentiously identify with the reformers & the puritans whose confessions & sermons roundly condemn their dictums (23:29-32); they fiercely indict the 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneers of Theonomy & Christian Reconstruction (Van Til, Rushdoony & Bahnsen) whilst having nothing to say themselves about a Biblical social ethics (23: 34). Just as God’s wrath was poured out upon the rotting carcass of Jerusalem in AD70, even so today we are witnessing the death of this particular ‘Whore of Babylon’ (Rev 18).

Food for thought: - If the present constituency of folk who identify as ‘Bible Christians’ really are to be identified with this image drawn from Rev 18 then one thing is apparent: her overthrow will be quite sudden! I reckon we’re living in that pivotal phase of redemptive history. Postmillennial principles of eschatology plainly encourage us to anticipate a Great Awakening of sleeping sheep who will be transformed into a colossal army of fighting soldiers for Christ as per Ezekiel 37 (Dry Bones prophesy). What is taking place today, right before our eyes is just such an awakening. The cultural Marxism & political correctness of globalism & one-world humanistic pantheism has over-reached and been largely discredited wherever thoughtful critical reflection is given to its creed. Even Darwinism is in free-fall decline! The western world is slowly responding by exercising a return to its traditional Christian

heritage coupled with a resurgence of patriotic nationalism and the recovery of a principled form of 'free-market economics'. The 20<sup>th</sup> century will be closely studied by future historians and the extensive use of humanistic propaganda and fake news will be thoroughly exposed in the light of God's revealed Truth!

### **Pluralism**

Even a superficial familiarity with Church history will grant that for the first millennium AD there was a principled attempt made by the expanding Church to retain its formal unity throughout the western world. The Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) proved remarkably successful at formulating a credal statement acceptable to ALL the orthodox strands within the international Body. The motivation for retaining formal unity is written large in the NT (Jn 17: 21; Acts 15; Eph 4:4, etc). Anyone familiar with the corpus of Cornelius Van Til will understand that it is the nature of 'truth' to be antithetical. It is on such a basis that the Laws of logic are founded! Consequently, there can only be ONE VERSION OF TRUTH! This is because God is one! It follows therefore, that it is an intrinsic part of the (authentic) Christian Church's vocation in history to 'work out its salvation with fear and trembling, learning to rightly divide the Word of God,' (Phil 2:12) etc.

But the contemporary Churches do not acknowledge this metaphysical reality. Rather, they formulate their own local creeds & nuanced versions of 'Christianity' which they present to their fold as a sort of smorgasbord of elements which the incumbent 'ministry team' or elders have deemed 'orthodox'. Their arrogance & blasphemy beggar belief. The result is thousands of competing denominations which collectively end up trampling the Truth of God underfoot in a parade of sectarianism which has become a laughingstock in the unbelieving world. What we desperately need is for the Church to repent of such folly and to go into a period of corporate prayer & intense study in the hope that God might furnish it with a Principled Ecumenism. The resulting 21<sup>st</sup> century Confession of Faith will be grounded in the best principles of conservative scholarship respecting legitimate textual criticism, historical-grammatical hermeneutics, systematic theology, etc. Such an undertaking really is possible, for Scripture is sufficient, perspicuous and inerrant!

Several of my close friends, & even members of my family, look at me with incredulity for interpreting the failure of the protestant Churches over recent centuries to agree upon a doctrinal standard as an symptom of noetic sin. Rather, they prefer to believe, Scripture is not clear – since good, honest scholars have arrived at a range of alternative propositions. They reckon, unwittingly, that the present chaos is indicative of God's failure to make Himself clear. What madness!

### **Popery**

This hopeless situation leads inexorably to the present widespread practice of installing a 'pope' in the local Church. These duplicitous false shepherds (see Phariseism above) teach their flock that Scripture is IN PRINCIPLE authoritative and infallible; but in PRACTICE, the presiding magisterium (Pastors & Preachers) are treated as local deities. Why? It's much easier to manage and control such a situation. Politically it's much more straightforward to censure the lone voice rocking the boat. Moreover, it's a thousand times easier to invoke the hate-crime of insubordination to the local minister than to sit down graciously & patiently hear his complaint. It's harder still to exercise due humility when his arguments are laid out and acknowledge the possibility of getting it wrong or overlooking the totality of Scriptural doctrine. The tragic result for droves of Church attendees is the subliminal acceptance of error from the pulpit and the gradual dilution of a doctrinal standard over the course of time.

Let me try to say all of this again. The faithful declaration of Biblical Truth ought to be the collaborative, weekly business of the local Church. What truth? That Truth which it can be readily demonstrated from Scripture & history that has been established by the best scholars & evangelical councils down through time. The principal Church we all collectively belong to as true covenant-keepers is a Church that is Theonomic, Reformed, Universal & Eternal (i.e. TRUE Church). That body identifies strongly with holistic, historic, systematic, Biblical theology. There is a famine of hearing the Word of God properly expounded today. Christians abound who retain contradictory, arbitrary or just silly notions of faith in their heads. It ought to be a Christian's principal business to grow up in all knowledge & understanding of 'the Truth as it is in Jesus' (Eph 4:21). Instead, it has become an obscure hobby for maverick intellectuals in the fold!

But centuries of history & scholarship show that it has not always been so. Rather, the quest for universal, objective Truth has been the heart-beat of all the faithful down through time. It is high time that it was once more elevated to its rightful place in the Church! May God rid us of protestant popes & recover within us a humble, courageous love for His Truth!

### **Pride & Petrification**

That's it, I'm done! Alas, experience convinces me that the struggle is far from over. Proof is not persuasion! As one well said, 'A man convinced against his will shall keep the same opinion still'. Nothing much will change unless there is a significant change of heart and a willingness for those exercising ecclesiastical rule over their sheep to humble themselves and climb down from their pedestals. First, they need to repent of their failure to recognise God's hand of judgement over the nation. Peter tells us that judgement begins at the house of God (1Pet 4:17) – i.e. within the evangelical Church movement! Their blindness and unwillingness to have a change of outlook is bound up with the general inertia we all experience when we are challenged to adopt a new paradigm. The prevailing legacy worldview is more familiar and certainly more comfortable! Thomas Kuhn wrote a compelling book around 60 years ago detailing the way in which scientific perspectives change over the course of history. The same principles apply to our 'religious' worldview – except the inherent forces are more powerful again by orders of magnitude! Pride and fear get in the way. Pride prevents us from hearing criticism. We are profoundly self-deceived and unwilling to contemplate mistakes in our thinking. We are far from being 'epistemologically self-conscious' (Van Til) preferring to run with the crowd and stand shoulder to shoulder with the vast majority who have chosen the broad and easy road (Matt 7:13). Athanasius bravely stood '*contra mundum*' – against the world. Will you?

But not only does pride paralyse our hearts; fear does too. God tells us, 'the fear of man brings a snare' (Pr 29:25). Most of us, if we could just be brutally honest with ourselves are afraid of the consequences of pursuing Christian faith with rigour. The cost is potentially immense – even life-threatening! But notice it was just such fearless courage that characterised the saints who went through tribulation for Christ...

*'And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.'* (Rev 12:11)

The personal cost involved in following Christ is massive. It may cost you your livelihood; it may cost you many friendships; it might even cause you to be ostracised from your family...

*'Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'* He who loves father or mother



*more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.’ (Matt 10:34-39)*

When all is said and done, the sort of commitment to Christ that requires that degree of self-sacrifice is beyond most of us. Who wants to run up against widespread collective hostility? Most churchgoers are not even prepared to undertake the education of their own children themselves. Instead, they put them in state-controlled nurseries where they are force-fed a mixed diet of half-baked truths and pure propaganda. Jesus warned against such folly...

*“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! (Matt 18:6-7)*

A true spirit of devotion to Christ recognises the deep-rooted nature of sin infecting the human condition. It perceives the grace and mercy of God extended towards it in the gospel and it pledges to fight with all it’s might against the prevailing presence and power of sin wherever it is found. With how much determination? With how much self-deprecation? Hear again the words of Christ...

*“If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire. (Matt 18:6-9)*

Finally, if you’ve got through to this final page, bravo! But if so, you’ve probably faced criticism yourself for exhibiting a hateful and judgemental spirit towards those who hold contrary opinions and convictions to your own. Persecution for fidelity to the Truth was always to be anticipated (Matt 5:11-12). If, in your heart of hearts, you recognise the legitimacy of this perspective I am presenting before you, you will also be able to identify with an attendant affection in your spirit. It is an actual hatred for those who are the enemies of God, who parade hypocritically as covenant keepers when in fact, they are fellow members of the synagogue of Satan. Be encouraged. Your feelings of antipathy and annoyance are honourable and legitimate! Let us give David the last word...

*Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God! Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men. For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your name in vain. Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies. (Ps 139:19-22)*

**Steve Layfield – December 2019**