

# **THE STATE OF THE NATION**

## **Unpacking Britain's Woes**

### **Financial Crisis**

Our nation is in trouble; deep trouble; far more than most people realise or our Government wishes to acknowledge. The financial crisis has highlighted the **culture of debt** that has ensnared the nation. It has also exposed the underlying problems that are rooted in the values of society. How did we reach this situation and what can be done about it?

### **Who's Responsible?**

Britain is not simply suffering from economic woes. The underlying cause of the financial crisis is primarily moral and spiritual. That was the conclusion of a meeting of Christian leaders from church, business, politics and academia in the House of Lords in December 2008. They recognised that the responsibility for the present state of our nation does not primarily lie with the bankers and the financial traders, but we all bear some responsibility for the moral and spiritual health of the nation. The meeting also concluded that God was calling Christians to recognise their share of responsibility and call for a 'season of prayer and fasting' for the nation in a spirit of humility and repentance.

### **Understanding the Situation**

If Christian leaders are to call their people to prayer and repentance they will need to give reasons. These are rooted in the period of rapid and radical social change that has taken place in Britain since the end of World War II. The following is a brief sociological analysis of the forces of social change that have transformed Britain during the past half century.

In every civilised society there are five major social institutions that form the structure of society. They are:

1. The Economy
2. The Family
3. Education
4. Law and Government
5. Religion

There is a rule recognised by sociologists whereby changes generated in any one of these five major social institutions affect all the others. Since 1960 Britain has been experiencing a social revolution in which each of the five major social institutions has been generating change while also being affected by the changes in each of the others. This has created highly destabilising and dysfunctional social forces resulting in the present situation. The changes began in the economy but the combined effects of concomitant changes in all the other institutions have finally resulted in destroying the stability of the economy and producing the present financial crisis. A short historical review will outline the processes of social change that have led to this crisis.

### **The Economy**

Our present troubles began in the economy in the 1950s when we were enjoying the post-war prosperity-boom of full employment and rising standards of living. At that time few people recognised the significance of the changes in the economy that would trigger a far-reaching social revolution. It began with the demand for labour created by post war reconstruction and the developing technological changes that were offering new entrepreneurial enterprise opportunities.

This was a great boost to the economy but an unforeseen social outcome was that for the first time in British history young people were able to earn substantial wages which created a new consumer group with high spending power and low social responsibilities. The economy rapidly adjusted its focus from age to youth, producing a new music industry and fashion and consumer goods, designed particularly for young people. As this new sector of the economy developed it had the side-effect of encouraging the socio/cultural shift away from an age dominated society that was to have far-reaching effects which led directly to the social revolution of the 1960s and '70s.

## **The State of the Nation – Unpacking Britain’s Woes (cont)**

### **The Family**

The pop culture and focus upon youth soon impacted family life and undermined the traditional respect for age. This began a paradigm shift in social values. Teenagers were recognised as a significant social group for the first time in British history and began to develop their own culture, emphasising and widening the generation gap between youth and the adult world. Emotional and behavioural problems in family life soon emerged. Children became less secure and parents found increasing difficulty in coping with work and parental responsibilities. These stresses and strains could not be confined to the family.

### **Education**

The new culture affected education. But there were also changes being generated from within the education system. A new brand of teachers emerged in the post-World War II period with revolutionary concepts of moving away from 'teaching by rote' to enable children to discover and embrace knowledge which required less formal discipline and more self-discipline among students. The relaxing of discipline in schools impacted family life in the home as well as the norms of social behaviour in public which required changes of law.

### **Law and Government**

But the institutions of law and government were also generating social change in social policy that affected the family and education and the economy. Politicians had the power to make changes in education, from grammar schools to comprehensive schools, and to control the curriculum, examinations and the exercise of discipline in the classroom, all of which had far-reaching effects in terms of social change in the nation.

The 1960s and 1970s saw the beginning of momentous changes brought about by politicians who had little understanding of the catastrophic effect their policies would have upon society. These ranged from the legalisation of abortion and easy divorce to the removal of restrictions on obscenity in publications and entertainment. Subsequent changes in law ranged from the legalisation of homosexual practices and the removal of restrictions on Sunday trading to fiscal and taxation measures that changed the status of marriage and affected family stability.

### **Religion**

At the same time revolutionary changes were taking place in religion as the views of a generation of liberal theologians filtered through into the public arena undermining confidence in the Bible as the word of God and destroying the foundations of moral values. This encouraged the relativism being taught in schools whereby teenage sexual activity was governed by what each individual felt to be comfortable and right for them. Corporate worship and religious education in schools was gradually faded out. Church attendance dropped rapidly from 1960 to the end of the century while Sunday schools that catered for three quarters of the nation's children in the 1950s changed to catering largely for the children of church-goers. The churches lost contact with millions of families who were at least nominal in adherence to Christianity and its moral teaching and ethical principles.

At the same time political policy encouraged immigration from non-Christian parts of the Commonwealth and allowed immigrants to build their temples and mosques and to promote their religious and social values. This changed Britain from its centuries-old Judaeo-Christian heritage to a polycultural, multi-religious secular society with no fixed standards of personal or social morality.

### **Media**

Alongside all these major social changes the media grew in power and influence dominated by secular values that were largely hostile to the Christian gospel. The voice of the church became increasingly suppressed with outlets limited by legislation, and a self-imposed silence resulting from a sense of despair in the face of the combined forces of secularism, materialism and atheism.

### **Consequences**

The result is that Britain has the highest rate of family breakdown and the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe and a reputation for drunkenness, offensive language, obscenity, and violent behaviour both at home and abroad. Our banking and financial institutions which for hundreds of years were recognised throughout the world for integrity, honesty and reliability are now seen to be corrupt, greedy and unreliable.

## **The State of the Nation – Unpacking Britain’s Woes (cont)**

### **Our Responsibility**

We Christians cannot say that we have no reason to repent or that we have no responsibility for the dire state of our nation. We have been so conscious of the power of the forces arrayed against the church that we have lost confidence in the power of Almighty God. Our half-hearted prayers have for so long gone unanswered that we had ceased to intercede with expectation and conviction. We are, nevertheless, responsible before God for allowing our land to be polluted by all the corrupting forces that have swept away centuries of blessing and protection.

God has watched over Britain for many centuries, bringing us through times of danger and times of economic hardship to the prosperity of the second half of the 20th century. But we are part of a generation that has squandered our prosperity by our greed and selfishness; weakened family life that gave security and love to our children; lost our social cohesion and corrupted our national moral standards. We have dishonoured our Christian heritage through our lack of concern for the poor of the world, our personal pursuit of material wealth and our reckless disregard of the natural environment of which before God we are stewards.

### **Prayer**

We Christians have been caught up and swept along with the revolutionary social changes. We have not held fast to Godly standards of personal and social behaviour. We have not been a prophetic voice in the nation declaring the word of the Living God and warning of the consequences of the vast changes that have occurred in the nation over the past half century. So today we share in the consequences - the fear of violent intruders in our homes and anti-social behaviour on our streets, unemployment and hardship in our families and the disgrace that has fallen upon our nation. We desperately need to come before the Lord in repentance, seeking his forgiveness and praying for the power of the Holy Spirit to transform our nation and heal our land.

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