

## 5. THE EXCLUSION OF GOD and MORAL DEGRADATION

The Scriptures give two fundamental reasons why people and nations come under the judgement of God. The first is that they reject the “Living God” in favour of idols; the second is that they abandon God’s revealed moral law which guides their relationships with each other. Jesus reminded his own generation of this with the words, “*Love the Lord your God ... and love your neighbour as yourself*”. The rejection of God is the more crucial of the two, since it is the rejection of God that leads to the rejection of moral law and to moral collapse. It is this rejection of God that is the major charge of the prophets against the Israelites. In the years that followed Amos’ word to Israel the rejection of God simply got worse and moral behaviour followed suit. It is this same rejection of God and his law that is his prime charge against our nations, and the root cause of the escalating chaos we are experiencing. There is every evidence that this last decade has seen a further lurch in this downward direction.

### The Rejection of God.

The rejection of God, or, as we have called it in our Western world, the “secularisation of society” is a process that has now been going on for at least three centuries. Though its roots go back further, it began to make itself felt with noticeable force in the eighteenth century “Enlightenment”. It grew steadily throughout the nineteenth century and it has now hit our society at the end of the 20thC with overwhelming force. Over that period it has not prevented some very strong spiritual movements emanating from Britain and N. America and establishing Christian witness right across the world, but none the less our proud boast now in Britain is that we are a secular society rather than a Christian society. We have reached a point where Christian thinking and the relevance of God has been marginalised, intellectually, politically and socially. Christian moral perspectives are not appropriate in the era of “political correctness”. The U.S. is similar, though it still has a strong religious segment. European nations have surrendered to secularism much more readily, France as long ago as the French Revolution in 1789.

The undermining of our Christian heritage came with literary and scientific discovery, accompanied by a strong philosophical insistence on the supremacy of the rationality of man. The literary and scientific discoveries led to an onslaught on the validity and integrity of the Scriptural documents and hugely undermined “revealed” faith. This has brought massive “doubt” into the church itself (where it still remains!). Science opened up the extraordinary size and complexity of our universe along with the vast ages of time in the formation of the planet, leaving man as an utterly insignificant creature, best seen as the outcome of bitterly fought evolution rather than the creation of God. Despite the fact that there have been many scientific and intellectual giants who have retained a strong faith, this rejection of God has gained the mainstream of thought in our society. The last fifty years have been years of increasing obliteration of the Christian heritage.

In the light of this it is not easy to measure progress in just one decade in the 21stC, except to say that the pace of rejection has clearly accelerated and is getting more aggressive. It is in this last decade that the marginalisation of Christian faith both in its beliefs and practice has become so clear and evident. Its basic beliefs are no longer valid coinage, and its moral code has been thoroughly revamped by liberal humanism. Christian vestiges are to be seen in our cathedrals and events like royal weddings, but births, marriages (partnerships) and deaths less and less have any real Christian connections and are marked in strikingly secular manner. To be an evangelical Christian is to invite the pejorative name of “Fundamentalist” and considered outside the pale and an oddity.

The decade has been notably marked in Britain by an outburst of militant “anti-God” atheism mounted by a number of vociferous academics of distinction. Their names are widely known, their cause having been espoused by publishers and media alike; Dawkins, Dennett, Hawkins, Hitchen, etc. Some have worked in concert to actively denigrate religion in general and Christianity in particular. Their militancy is seen in the accusation that religion is not something to be ignored as outdated but is actually to be rooted out as something very dangerous to society. Accordingly they have worked in militant fashion for it to be banned in schools and higher education. They have loudly ascribed wars and oppression to religion, totally ignoring the history of the world-wars of the 20thC that came out of non-religious atheistic and oppressive ideologies. They have chosen to ignore the vast history of the charity and education that has been done in the name of God. Mother Theresa has been particularly “rubbished”. They have found abundant space in the media, greedy as it always is for the outrageous, and so have become household names, in notable contrast to their equally distinguished critics, like Alistair McGrath, who have exposed the fallacy of their logic, but remain ignored. They have even considered bringing atheists “out” through events such as “Atheist Pride”!

This aggressive atheistic onslaught, however, is probably less important than the fast growing ignorance of Christian truth among the nation at large and the sense of the irrelevancy of God in a consumer age.. The large Sunday Schools which still existed post-war have now gone, Christian content in normal school education has shrunk to virtually nothing, and theology is fast losing ground at university level. Very simply we have a situation in which more and more there is “*no knowledge of God in the land*”. The religious framework of society may have often been ignored in past ages by many, but now the framework itself has virtually gone.

However, our secularisation does not mean that we cannot be accused of idolatry. Our society may not put up graven images of gods, but we have actually done something worse in that we now virtually place humanity as the central image to be worshipped. If God has been dethroned by intellectual philosophical scientific rationalism, it is only for man himself to be enthroned as the all important piece of conscious creation. Man has become his own idol, he is supreme. And since there is no discernable rational purpose for his existence, man is best served by allowing him every soulish indulgence and pleasure.

### The Rejection of God’s Law - The Sexual Tsunami

With the rejection of God has come a moral landslide. No where is this more evident than in sexual behaviour. The modern world has proved to be a litmus test and a profound vindication for one of Paul the Apostle’s most penetrating

statements about sexual impurity. Speaking of those who reject God he says, *“They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator ...Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies one with another.”* (Rom. 1:23-24) In other words, Paul states as a divine principle that the outcome of a rejection of God will be a downward spiral into sexual degradation. Not that people involved in the spiral will necessarily see such behaviour as degradation, and on the contrary might well see it as “new freedoms” or as a much more satisfying and “liberal” life style. That is precisely the direction our nation and the western world have taken as secularisation has grown. Our cry is that we have sexual freedom. A much more accurate appraisal is to say that sexual degradation has rapidly increased in tempo since the 1960s as all restraining legislation has been removed, and in this last decade it has become a flood in full spate. The very words, “adultery”, and “fornication” are dead words, unpleasant and offensive.

The world of drama, literature and art has always been in the forefront of such sexual degradation ever since the Greeks and Romans. Wherever there is promiscuity, license, rape and worse they will find their way into these arts. There it is grotesquely exhibited by people frequently of considerable artistic talent and so becomes generally acceptable. Morals then have to give way to aesthetics. Once portrayed on stage or page it feeds back as an unedifying stimulus for many for whom artistic work is an idol in itself. This is the story of our own age. Week after week the cultural guides of our newspapers and magazines pour out lurid, vulgar appreciations of such art. It is a gloss for the unclean and pornographic. As I write, the Edinburgh Arts Festival Fringe has pushed the uncouth boundaries beyond imagination, much to the delight of its devotees.

This is not something present only in the upper strata of the “cultural” world. It runs in a flood through all mass media. As in the arts, so also in the media the movement is always towards more and more explicit presentation and description of sex. The last decade has provided a diet on screen and on the page that can only be described as grossly pornographic, interwoven with aggression and even violence. Scarcely any programme, even if is purportedly a documentary, appears without sexual references or bias. Nature programmes must have the sexual life of animals, the lives of composers must include talk of their “indiscretions”, the most innocent of programmes must have sexual innuendo – or they don’t rate for inclusion. Like wise, every novel, every story must have is glaring piece of sex, the more explicit the better. No author is likely to find a publisher otherwise!

When we turn to the modern communication networks we find that internet pornography has reached enormous proportions and effecting millions of people. We find that sex is big business; it’s very useful for selling anything and everything. If it is mixed with scandal it will always push sales, something the News of the World explicitly acted on before its demise. We find female trafficking increasing. We find every perversity. All this is massively destructive in itself for society and for secure family relationships, and yet we find a deafening silence everywhere on the need for self control. We will talk of birth control, but not self control. But the most serious thing about all this is that it is the sure mark of the judgement of God at work on a society; *“he gave them over to sexual impurity”*. It indicates where things are going and divine displeasure. It’s destructive effect will be of Tsunami proportions.

#### The Rejection of God’s Law - The Deluge of Covetousness

This decade has been equally one of constantly seeking pleasure and material goods. The very idea of “not coveting” has been blown apart by every advertisement and hoarding. We need those luxuries, and we deserve those luxuries - that is the constant mantra which is fed to us! The tenth commandment is very clearly out. Life consists of pursuing possessions not contentment. That this has happened is plain for all to see. This process has gone through all social strata, though it is most glaring and obnoxious in those who have the most.

The increasing obscene covetousness amongst the most gifted of people in finance and industry has been the hall mark of the decade. Such people have actually admitted measuring their standards not by the poverty of others but by the greater profits of their peers. Their attitude has been that if their colleagues have made £2 million on the stock exchange or out of their hedge fund investment and they themselves have only made £1 million, they must do better. This is not an imaginary scenario - profits are of this order and much higher. For some it is measured in £billions. Even after the crash, and the palpable guilt of the financial entrepreneurs, there is still a huge reluctance to downscale the self-awarded payments, no matter that they are ludicrously high. The bonus will not budge!

This covetousness has an inevitable domino effect When profit and possessions are supreme the values of honesty and integrity are swift casualties. Lying and stealing all too quickly become endemic. Corruption takes over. Behind corruption there always lies threats, bullying and then violence. The slide in this direction is becoming more and more obvious. Education does not stem the tide here; it simply makes it more sophisticated.

One very clear and crucial straw in the wind of moral collapse is the degradation of language. At all levels the obscenity and vulgarity of language has become extreme. The language in which the top politicians and statesmen speak has become utterly polluted. . Like wise in the boardrooms of finance or industry the same language is used without a second thought. It is a language which reveals a hard, brutish, selfish and unclean world. It scarcely matters who is present or not present. At the other end of the social scale it is the only language that an alienated under-class knows; it is the means of constantly expressing its frustration and is laced with aggression. The coarseness is utterly degrading. More distressing than the language is the failure to perceive it for what it is. Foul mouths are sure indicators of foul hearts.

This the sort of age in which we now live. It does not improve; it continues to slide. We do not have a God who ignores all this. Such behaviour comes as a judgement in itself , and it inevitably brings upon itself further divine retribution.