

Lessons Muslims can Learn from the Decline of the Church

Lessons Muslims can Learn from the Decline of the Church

Electronic Edition - Version 1.00
Monday 6 September, 2021

Copyright © 2021 - Madeenah.com

2

All Rights Reserved*

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the copyright owner; *Except for one who wishes to charitably print and freely distribute this publication, "as is" - strictly without change, solely seeking the Pleasure of Allaah (سُبْحَانَهُ وَتَعَالَى).

فَمَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ رَبِّهِ فَلْيَعْمَلْ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا وَلَا يُشْرِكْ بِعِبَادَةِ رَبِّهِ أَحَدًا

**“So whoever hopes for the Meeting with his Lord,
let him work righteousness and associate none
as a partner in the worship of his Lord.”**

The Noble Qur.aan - Soorah al-Kahf, Aayah 110

Authored by
Abul Abbaas Naveed Ayaaz

Publisher
Madeenah.com
al-Madeenah an-Nabawiyah
Saudi Arabia
eMail: admin@madeenah.com

madeenah.com

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

3

“

On a recent Radio 4 programme discussing the efforts made by the Church in alleviating national poverty, the fall and decline of churches - as well as how they have spent millions of pounds to try to counteract their declining membership - was discussed...

”

In the name of Allāh, the most Merciful, the bestower of Mercy.

On a recent Radio 4 programme¹ discussing the efforts made by the Church in alleviating national poverty, the fall and decline of churches - as well as how they have spent millions of pounds to try to counteract their declining membership - was discussed.

The case of a church in Manchester was presented where only, “thirty members listen to the sermon, hymns are sung and tea and biscuits are consumed... the members share cordial chit chat before leaving for home.” It was stressed that this is, “replicated in churches throughout the country.”

The decline of the Church

Recent figures confirm how far the church has fallen:

- From the year 2006 to 2016, Methodist church membership has been falling by an average of 3.5% on an annual basis. Current figures are only 188,398 members.²
- As of 2014, the proportion of the population who identify as having no religion (48.5%) outnumber those who define themselves as being Christian (43.8%)—Anglicans (19.9%), non-denominational Christian (9.3%), Catholics (8.6%), Methodist (1.3%) and other denominations.³

1 Radio 4, Sunday 18th November 2018. Sunday morning religious news and current affairs programme presented by Edward Stourton.

The recording can be listened to: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m00018s4>

2 As reported by Church Times from the Annual Methodist Conference [2017]

See: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2017/7-july/news/uk/methodist-church-ponders-decline>

3 Stephen Bullivant, senior lecturer in theology and ethics at St Mary's Catholic University in Twickenham, figures from NatCen's British Social Attitudes. The figures do not include Northern Ireland.

See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/23/no-religion-outnumber-christians-england-wales-study>



The case of a church in Manchester was presented where only, “thirty members listen to the sermon, hymns are sung and tea and biscuits are consumed... the members share cordial chit chat before leaving for home.”



- According to the Church of England, 18 people per 1,000 regularly attend church; however this will fall to 10 per 1,000 over the next 30 years.⁴
- UK Church membership has declined from 10.6 million in 1930 to 5.5 Million in 2010, or as a percentage of the population, from approximately 30% to 11.2%. By 2013, this had declined further to 5.4 million (10.3%). If current trends continue, membership will fall to 8.4% of the population by 2025.⁵
- Church attendance, as opposed to membership, has declined from 6,484,300 to 3,081,500 - equivalent to a decline from 11.8% to 5.0% of the population.⁶

It is interesting to note that the above statistics are despite the existence of over 7,000 faith schools in England alone, most of which are either Church of England or Catholic.

Church strategies to counteract the decline

In trying to counteract this demoralising trend, the Church of England has introduced a £72m 'Renewal and Reform' initiative⁷ that places a greater emphasis on evangelism. Many churches have also turned to social work like food banks and other social participation projects.

An increase in such activities has indeed resulted in larger church-related participation. However, increased numbers attending church social activities does not result in a strengthening of Christianity amongst attendees. In fact, this very strategy of shifting the focus away from the fundamentals of their religion to social activities is exactly what is leading to the decline of the Church. When faith-based activities are centred around social activities, there is little

4 Stated by John Spence, the Finance Chief of the Church of England.

See: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/17/church-of-england-attendance-decline-30-years-general-assembly>

5 Statistics from the Brierley Consultancy, published by Church Statistics.

See: <https://www.faithsurvey.co.uk/uk-christianity.html/>

6 Ibid.

7 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/church-of-england-slowly-dying-as-congregation-set-to-halve-over-30-years-a6881641.html>

5

“
In trying to counteract this demoralising trend, the Church of England has introduced a £72m 'Renewal and Reform' initiative that places a greater emphasis on evangelism...

”

substance and depth left. For many people, social participation is a passing phase; the strength or weakness of which, is dependent upon the coming and going of that phase.

Current state of Christianity

It has been noticed, and widely reported in the media, that Christianity has become more liberal, welcoming and integrative. Whilst increasing its focus on social activities, Christianity has adapted to current trends by relaxing many of its rules. The religion has been modernised and liberalised, yet despite all of this, the churches are now even more empty.

Due to the absence of the Injīl, original scripture revealed to Prophet 'Isa, there are no real rituals of worship, even Sunday Mass is a combination of music, hymns, singing and dancing; many aspects of life and society are left ungoverned without the legal rulings of Ḥalāl (permitted) and Ḥarām (prohibited) which exists in Islām; Christians are left without any detailed guidance in how to worship God as well legislative guidance. Christianity has become a religion of faith in salvation through the death of Jesus, it provides some moral guidance which is common to almost all religions, but little relevance to real life issues and even less answers to problems faced by society.

The very fact that the Church feels their religion needs to change and adapt is evidence of the falsehood of the religion. Had Christianity been God's legislation for the betterment of humanity, it would remain unmodified, undistorted and applicable to the end times.

Lessons we can learn as Muslims

As Muslims, we take great pride in Islām being a complete and perfect way of life that does not require any modifications. It remains applicable and appropriate to all times, people and places. This is the very essence of the saying of Allāh,

{This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favour upon you and have approved for you Islām as your religion} [05:03]

In contrast to the current strategy of the Church, we believe that humanity needs to adapt to Islām, not the opposite whereby Islām is adapted to our needs, whims and societal trends.

6

“

...Christianity has adapted to current trends by relaxing many of its rules. The religion has been modernised and liberalised, yet despite all of this, the churches are now even more empty.

”

7

Unlike Christianity, we do not modify our religion to suit the latest trends and secular pressures; in fact the very notion of constantly changing boundaries of morality is absurd. We do not need to change the core tenets of our religion to increase our numbers, because we believe it is these very tenets which make Islām the solution to world problems. Whilst working to make the message of Islām as far-reaching as possible, wishing guidance upon as many as possible, we hold firm to its teachings, without sacrificing its principles and compromising its values.

Similar to the churches, some mosques have tried to increase their congregation by expanding their appeal through various activities. Some have introduced 'games rooms' within the mosque in an attempt to attract youth. Others have increased in organising outings and excursions, and developing social outreach programmes.

Of course, this is not to say that such activities and social programmes have no place in the mosque; each strategy must be measured on its merits. However, this should never be the focus of the mosque. The core of any mosque should always be the teaching of authentic knowledge, the call to implement the Sunnah to its every letter, opposing every type of Bid'ah (religious innovation) and counteracting creedal doubts relating to Tawhīd and Imān.

Our mosques do not need to be "fun" places for the youth - this has never been the role of the mosque. Yes, they should be open and welcoming but not "fun and trendy". Islamic knowledge and learning should not be trivial, humorous and populist. Knowledge in Islām has never been light-hearted - people should be taught that learning requires effort and striving, with a sincere heart and an intelligent and enthusiastic mind. People should be taught what they need to know to better their Dunya (worldly life) and Ākhirah (hereafter), not what is popular, nor what they merely want.

Mosques are places of 'Ibādah (worship), learning and tranquillity. They should be respected and revered; correct etiquettes should be upheld in the mosques such as keeping them tidy and fragrant, wearing appropriate clothing, avoiding idle speech, listening attentively and preserving diligence, focus and serenity.

People are searching for this in their lives. People are searching for spirituality, sense and direction. If mosques become places of triviality and mere enjoyment, the very people searching for spirituality, purpose and depth will look to other religions.

“

*Unlike Christianity,
we do not modify
our religion to suit
the latest trends and
secular pressures; in
fact the very notion
of constantly chang-
ing boundaries of
morality is absurd.*

”

8

We must also be cautious of ‘liberal Islām’ wherein its proponents call to a version of Islām much like contemporary Christianity - that is watered-down and restricted to a series of vague spiritual messages in place of orthodox Islamic principles and practical tenets. Indicators of this approach include:

- Instead of Hijāb being a physical veil covering the body, it is explained as ‘modesty of the heart’ or ‘modest fashion.’
- Islamic orthodoxy is labelled ‘fundamentalism,’ and instead ‘progressive’ and ‘open-minded’ Islām is touted in which one is free to interpret according to one’s own whims.
- Instead of segregation being physical separation between genders, it becomes a ‘segregation of desires.’
- Mosques become centres of worldly life and socialising, as opposed to places of worship and knowledge.
- Instead of Islām being a system of complete submission to Allāh through obligatory and encouraged acts worship, diligence and knowledge, it becomes a religion of celebrations, anniversaries, commemoration and sainthood.

A call to authentic Islām

As Muslims, we want to practice Islām as revealed in the Qur’ān and conveyed by Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ himself outlined a methodology for us to practise Islām in this manner, and that is by implementing its teachings according to the way of the early pious generation of Muslims – the Salaf. This is a tradition of Islam; knowledge is learnt and passed down from generation to generation, with its origins easily traceable to the Prophet and his noble companions.

In the Qur’an, Allah makes mention of not opposing the way of the Prophet ﷺ and “the way of the believers”. The latter relates to the way of the Companions and by extension those who were closest to their way.

{And whoever opposes the Messenger after the guidance has become clearly manifest to him and follows a path other than that of the believers, We shall abandon him to that which he has adopted...}

[04:115]

“

We must also be cautious of ‘liberal Islam’ wherein its proponents call to a version of Islam much like contemporary Christianity - that is watered-down and restricted to a series of vague spiritual messages in place of orthodox Islamic principles and practical tenets.

”

In addition to the above, the Prophet ﷺ also made mention of the virtue of the early generation of Muslims: ‘the best of people are my generation then those who succeed them, then those who succeed them’.⁸

Islām is based on two fundamentals:

1. Tawḥīd: Sincerity in worship. Every act of worship must be directed to Allāh alone, who has no partner, son or representative. Islām is truly the religion of monotheism.
2. Ittibā’: Worshipping Allāh in the same manner which the Prophet ﷺ did so, without any innovations or changes,

The guidance of Islām is taken from two primary sources:

1. Qur’ān: The revelation which Allāh gave to Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. It is today as it was when originally revealed, without any alterations.
2. Ḥadīth: The sayings and actions of the Prophet ﷺ as authentically narrated to us.

Importantly, the understanding and implementation of the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth is limited to that of the Companions and the Salaf. In traversing this methodology, we can ensure that the teachings of Islām that are taught today are the same pure teachings taught by the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. - and this is what distinguishes it from Christianity.

No sincere knowledgeable Christian can claim that contemporary Christianity is the very Christianity of Jesus and his disciples. It is well known that many of the “Christian” festivals have roots in paganism; the bible is a collection of books and writings which, besides from the Old Testament, were collected over decades. The writings contains “accounts” of Jesus as opposed to it being the revealed words God like the Qur’ān.

“

No sincere knowledgeable Christian can claim that contemporary Christianity is the very Christianity of Jesus and his disciples.

”

8 Collected by al-Bukhārī & Muslim

A stark warning from a Christian to those purporting “liberal Islām”

Recently, the BBC⁹ reported the conversion of a renowned, Irish female singer to Islām. Starting with Catholicism, moving to liberal Christianity and coming to the ‘natural conclusion of any intelligent theologian’s journey,’ she entered Islām.

Amongst the many comments made, one in particular highlighted the current state of Christianity and the dangers that face Muslims. Jeremy McLellan, a devout Christian with a passion for interfaith and charitable efforts, insightfully stated:

*“My Catholic friends have noted how weird it is that she went from Catholicism to liberal Christianity to Islam, but that’s not weird at all. I say this in a friendly way, but liberal Christianity can’t compete with Islam. Once you strip Christianity of ritual submission, prayer, fasting, beauty, pilgrimage, rules, concern for truth, etc, the human heart searches for what will provide those things. The only religion that seems to confidently offer that anymore (especially in Europe) is Islam. So unless Christians get their act together, I think we can expect a lot more conversions to Islam in the future. Don’t feel left out, though, Muslims. Once liberal Islam gains strength you will have the same problems. You’ll have woke [sic] Imams saying s*** like “The real Hajj is when you walk to your neighbors house to say hello” or “Muhamad never existed but the idea of him is still good” or “as long as you believe in Allah you don’t have to follow any rules.” If that seems insane to you, well, welcome to the last few hundred years of Christianity.”¹⁰*

Any attempt to modernise, liberalise or modify Islām will hasten the decline of those who set out to do so. As for Islām it will remain preserved and protected with the help of Allāh, by the patient struggle of its scholars and the firmness of the righteous Muslims.

‘We should not fear the wastage of Islām. We should only fear our own destruction if we turn away from it. There is no honour for us, no place nor value except due to this great religion which Allāh has blessed us with.’¹¹

9 Sinead O’Connor converts to Islām.

See: (26/10/18) <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-45987127>

10 footnote

11 Stated by Shaykh Šālīh al-Fawzān during an open session, at Imām University, 11th Rajab 1439h. Reported by various social outlets.

10

“

Recently, the BBC reported the conversion of a renowned, Irish female singer to Islam. Starting with Catholicism, moving to liberal Christianity and coming to the ‘natural conclusion of any intelligent theologian’s journey,’ she entered Islam.

”

This religion is the religion of Allāh. It will not become deviated - our Lord will protect and support it. It is only our own deviation that we should fear if we turn away from it or attempt to modify or modernise it. As long as a person remains sincere and firm, Allāh will keep him firm. As for those who step back from this religion, Allāh will keep them away.

We ask Allah for certainty in Iman, and strength in actions.

May Allah guidance, piety, chastity and contentment.

May peace, blessings and salutations be upon our beloved Prophet, his family, companions and followers.

Written by,

Abul Abbaas Naveed Ayaaz
Graduate of the Islamic University of Madinah

23rd Muharram, 1443h
Corresponding to 31st August, 2021

11

“

This religion is the religion of Allah. It will not become deviated - our Lord will protect and support it. It is only our own deviation that we should fear if we turn away from it or attempt to modify or modernise it.

”