

The Decline of Religion – and The Future of Churches

DiPs at The Blue Mugge pub, Mon 23 May 2016, 7.45pm – 9.15pm.

Notes based on earlier *Mugge* and *Trout* sessions with some new questions....

1. *New Scientist* articles, 17 March 2012, and *New Humanist* ..'Sociology of Religion', Nov-Dec 2012

"Mozart was 'a born musician' (he was lucky)... we are all 'born speakers' and 'born walkers'... the vast majority of us are 'born believers'." This is the argument of Justin L. Barnett, Director of the Thrive Center for Human Development, California. He reports research showing that babies and young children '...do not need to be indoctrinated to believe in god. They naturally gravitate towards the idea.'
2. So, with adults 'Because of our highly social nature we pay special attention to agents. We are strongly attracted to explanations of events in terms of agent action - particularly events that are not readily explained in terms of ordinary causation.'
Hence, faced with the awesome mystery of the Universe/s most humans want to believe that there is some design... some ultimate meaning and agent...
3. Sociologist, Linda Woodhead, directing a long academic (£12 million!) project mapping religion in society, argues – in *The New Humanist* - that religion is not disappearing but transforming. It's true that in Britain 'church attendance of the old form is in steep decline...' but she quotes surveys that show more people now believe in 'God as Spirit or Life-force' than in a 'personal God', and more people identify themselves as 'spiritual' than as 'religious'. Alongside this has come the re-ritualisation of life - contemporary practices of marking sites of road deaths with flowers, naming ceremonies.... etc.
4. Take a view on:
 - a) Buddhism quickly became established in SE Asia but now, two millennia later there are 376 million followers world-wide, almost 5 million Americans call themselves Buddhists, there are around 200,000 in Britain and Buddhism is one of the fastest growing religions in the West...
 - b) Hinduism is probably the World's oldest religion. Unlike most other religions, Hinduism has no single founder, no single scripture, and no commonly agreed set of teachings. Why has it survived so long?
 - c) Islam?
5. Despite the above – in Britain many Churches are experiencing falling numbers of congregations. What should be done with the often fine and even wonderful buildings?
6. Take Leek and its churches, for example. Comments on the wonders of Leek's ecclesiastical architecture... Which gains the *Mugge* award as the finest, as architecture? Review what has happened in the last few decades and what is likely to now happen in the future. Assuming continued fall in congregations, what we recommend for the future of the buildings?