

## Prayer in Public Places

A Senior House of Commons committee has been appointed to consider ways of changing, or even abolishing the morning prayer that opens the chamber's daily proceedings. This prayer to God, in the name of Jesus Christ, is not considered politically correct. Although I am saddened by this proposal, am not surprised. Our Western society once regarded itself as a Christian civilization. It is now post-Christian.

In British tradition the Christian faith has had a powerful influence. In the 19th century most villages and towns had primary schools with the Bible as the basis of education. Church attendance was at a peak, and people were hearing the Bible regularly. The Church did not keep the faith confined within the four walls of its sanctuaries, the Gospel was the active agent in bringing Christian influence to bear on the wider culture. 19th century Canadian culture was also predominantly Christian with its Christian elementary schools, colleges, universities and a Christian based ethic. But Christian influence in both England and Canada has rapidly declined. Wilbert R. Shenk, contributing editor of *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, links this loss of influence to the rise of a new generation of writers and novelists-including George Bernard Shaw and H.G.Wells-who were either ignorant of the Bible or hostile to it. Shenk says that recently it has been observed that British high school students who today understand Milton and Dante are not the direct descendents of the Anglo-Saxons but the sons and daughters of recent Muslim immigrants. Says Shenk, "Religious language and symbols out of monotheistic faith traditions continue to function in their universe of discourse." Professors and instructors at Canadian universities and colleges complain about the same thing. Many students are not acquainted with even the simplest Bible stories e.g. David and Goliath. They are unable to come to grips with classic English literature with its multitude of Biblical references.

To evangelize a post-Christian culture is more difficult than a pre-Christian pagan society. The apostles Peter and Paul preached to a generation for whom the Gospel was completely new. There was an eagerness to listen and to respond. In our age, the gospel must be proclaimed to people who have left Christianity behind them, who reject terms such as guilt, punishment and repentance. They only have a vague memory of the Christian Faith, if any at all. The church must learn to understand our age and challenge it.

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