

IRRELEVANT?
SHOULD CHRISTIANITY STILL HAVE A VOICE IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE?

Thank you for inviting me to speak tonight. The topic is ‘Irrelevant? Should Christianity still have a voice in the public square?’ So three points. First, a note on secularism and the demise of Christianity in Britain; then, some points from Pope Benedict XVI; finally, the Church’s role in strengthening Britain’s Christian patrimony.

1. Secularism and the Demise of Christianity

Hardly a day goes by without mention in the British press of an apparent collision between Christianity and today’s so-called ‘secular culture.’ Recent examples include the Pentecostalist couple from Derby who were told they could not foster children because of their negative views on homosexuality, a ban upheld by the High Court.¹ Then there was the community nurse from Somerset who, feeling sorry for an elderly patient, offered to pray for her, for which she was suspended for failing to demonstrate a professional commitment to equality and diversity.² Again, there was the Catholic girl from Kent who was barred from wearing a crucifix at school.³ And some local councils regularly replace the word ‘Christmas’ with ‘The Holiday Season’ and one year, an Oxford council-funded charity referred to Christmas as the ‘Winter Light Festival.’⁴

In Britain, a secular culture is now in the ascendant, although the terms secular, secularism and secularisation are ill-defined. Indeed, secularism is more an attitude or atmosphere than a fully worked-out system of thought. Yet essentially, secularism means a concern with the *saeculum*, the world, this world rather than the next. It is about living, at least in public, without religion and its ‘sacred canopy.’⁵ Secularism has a political dimension: the principle that Church and State, religion and politics, must be strictly separated. In other words, to protect the equality of every citizen in a pluralist society, politicians and policy makers adopt a neutral attitude towards religious groups and personal life-style choices, as long as behaviour remains within the law. Religion - beliefs about the meaning of life, the morally good, God and life after death - are ring-fenced as matters of private opinion. There are, however, two forms of this. Hard-line secularists, such as the National Secular Society, seek systematically to exclude any religious expression from the public square; as Alasdair Campbell once said, “We don’t do God.”⁶ Soft-core secularists, on the other hand, happily wish each other ‘Merry

¹ BBC News 28th February 2011: see www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-derbyshire-12598896 (March 2014)

² BBC News 1st February 2009: see news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/somerset/7863699.stm (March 2014)

³ BBC News 13th January 2007: see news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/kent/6258451.stm (March 2014)

⁴ *The Daily Telegraph* 2nd November 2008: see www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/3367390/Christmas-banned-in-Oxford-by-council-owned-charity.html (March 2014)

⁵ See R. Fisichella *The New Evangelisation: Responding to the Challenge of Indifference* (Leominster, Gracewing: 2012), especially 25-48. Cf. P. Berger *The Sacred Canopy. Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York, Doubleday: 1967)

⁶ See news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/3301925.stm (March 2014). He made the comment in 2003 to a journalist interviewing the then Prime Minister Tony Blair who was about to ask the PM about his religious convictions.

Christmas.’ They tolerate Britain’s Christian traditions, as long as those who practice those traditions do not expect any privileges or discriminate against the rights of others.

Secularism is now so dominant in Britain, being religious is deemed exceptional.⁷ Yet essentially, perhaps surprisingly, secularism is a Christian heresy. It is a deconstructed version of Christian morality, a set of second-order Christian values shorn from their theological moorings, a form of post-Christian ethics that thrives because its values continue to derive their vitality from the Christian patrimony still embedded in British culture. If religion is defined as belief in a deity, with a moral code based on that belief, and a theology that interprets it, then secularism is a reversed religion. Its core belief is doubt; its moral code is a way of life as if God does not exist; its theology is about being human. It even has its own theological terms such as equality, diversity, freedom, respect, tolerance, non-discrimination, multiculturalism, social cohesion, ethnic communities, inclusivity, quality of life, sustainable development and environmentalism. All these values are derived from fundamental Christian values. Thus, the secular concern for tolerance comes from the biblical ‘love of neighbour’ but, disconnected from Christian practice and belief, it has become a soft value, free-wheeling, expanded with new meaning, now permitting what formerly was unlawful.

Secularism in Britain has been accompanied by secularisation, that is, the decline of Christianity and the emergence of a post-Christian culture. In the 2011 National Census, the number of those who self-identify as Christian is now just 59% of the population (3 in 5). This is a decline from 71% in 2001; by 2018, Christians will be in a minority⁸. 1 in 4 people (25% of the population) now say they have no religion, up from 14% in 2001. Incidentally, Muslims are next largest religious group, rapidly growing at 4.8% (up from 3% in 2001), then in order Hindus, Sikhs and Jews. Most Christians belong to the Anglican Church. Catholics number 5M or 8%.

Sociologists explain this data variously. The classic view, called the ‘secularisation paradigm,’⁹ is that since the Middle Ages, Christianity in Britain has been in continuous decline, as measured by the numbers of people attending Sunday worship. Less than 1 in 10 now attend church regularly, defined as once a month. Callum Brown, in his *The Death of Christian Britain*, argues that a catastrophic collapse in church membership occurred in 1970s, after the ‘60s with their far-reaching cultural, social and sexual revolutions: youth-culture, the music of the Beatles (1962), the contraceptive pill, the legalisation of abortion and homosexuality (1967), the women’s liberation movement (1968), easier divorce, and so on.¹⁰ The ‘Swinging Sixties’ represented the collapse of the traditional family, a sexual revolution that ushered in new gender roles for women, who in a family uphold religious traditions and moral values. Other sociologists, such as Grace Davie,¹¹ agree with this but argue that while Christian practice has declined, Christian beliefs still remain, even if increasingly

⁷ As Charles Taylor puts it, in Western democracies all live under “regimes of secularism”. See J. Maclure and C. Taylor *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience* (London, Harvard UP: 2011) 9f

⁸ See www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/index.html (March 2014).

⁹ See S. Bruce *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford, Blackwell: 2002)

¹⁰ C. Brown *The Death of Christian Britain* (London, Routledge: 2001)

¹¹ G. Davie *Religion in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford, Blackwell: 1994)

unconventional. These beliefs surface on public occasions, at royal weddings, at baptisms and funerals, especially the funeral of a child. Such flowerings of religious sentiment show the Brits to be ‘unchurched’ but not necessarily non-believers. They believe but they do not belong.

On the other hand, Graeme Smith claims that church-going is not the best nor the only measure of religiosity.¹² Secularism, he says, is essentially Christian, though for him it is *not* a heresy but an entirely legitimate version of Christianity. It may be true that most people in 21C Britain do not go to church and do not believe in conventional Christian doctrines, but they do still believe in Christian ethics. Britain is a Christian ethics society and it is this that makes our culture Christian. Ethics is today’s issue as seen in recent debates about child-abuse, gay marriage and assisted suicide.

At the heart of secularism is relativism. In 2005, in a homily at Mass to the cardinals who had come to Rome to elect the new pope, the then Cardinal Ratzinger, said:

“Today, having a clear faith based on the Creed of the Church is often labelled as fundamentalism. Whereas relativism, that is, letting oneself be "tossed here and there, carried about by every wind of doctrine", seems the only attitude [appropriate to] modern times. Yet [in this] we are building a dictatorship of relativism that recognizes nothing as definitive, and whose ultimate goal consists solely in one's own ego and desires.

We, however, have a different goal: the Son of God, the true man. He is the measure of true humanism.”¹³

Relativism is the philosophy that sees truth as relative. Because truth has no fixed foundation or referent, then what is true for one may not be true for another. It leads to liberalism. Liberalism is the philosophy that goodness has no fixed foundation or referent and so virtues and values are determined by personal preference. The spectre of dictatorship arises when the State stands back from truth and goodness in order either to enforce one group’s truth-claims over another’s or to impose a permissive neutrality before mutually exclusive truth-claims. In this way, what is right becomes what is legal. It was precisely this behind the recent debate about the redefinition of marriage. If marriage can be redefined as a union of two people of the same sex, why not sibling marriage? Why not polygamous marriages? Why not inter-species marriage? Benedict spoke of a growing totalitarianism in European secular societies. Truth is not relative, he argued; its foundation is in right reason and the natural law, and this is confirmed by divine revelation in Jesus Christ. What has happened in the modern European context is that a loss of faith has dissolved the foundations of ethics.¹⁴

¹² G. Smith *A Short History of Secularism* (London, Tauris: 2010)

¹³ Mass *Pro Eligendo Romano Pontifice: Homily of Card. Joseph Ratzinger Dean of the College of Cardinals Vatican Basilica Monday 18 April 2005*, available on-line at www.vatican.va/gpII/documents (March 2014).

¹⁴ Interestingly, on a visit to the Vatican in 2012, Baroness Warsi, notably a Muslim, said that Europe needed to become more confident in its Christian identity in order to encourage a greater social cohesion:

“... [To] encourage social harmony, people need to feel stronger in their religious identities, more confident in their beliefs. ... Too often there is a suspicion of faith in our continent, where signs of religion cannot be displayed or worn in government buildings, where ... faith is sidelined, marginalised and downgraded. It all hinges on a basic misconception: That somehow to create equality and space for minority faiths and cultures, we need to erase our majority religious heritage.”

(slightly adapted). See www.gov.uk/government/speeches/baroness-warsi-speech-in-the-holy-see (March 2014).

An egregious example of this is the new concept of equality. In its 2013 document *Religion or Belief and the Workplace* the Equalities and Human Rights Commission failed entirely to differentiate between religion and religious communities on the one hand, and personal life-style choices on the other.¹⁵ Consequently, vegetarianism, environmentalism and even wearing a beard are equated with classic religions such as Judaism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. This is not only grossly disrespectful to the members of those religions, it expresses an absolutist or totalitarian view of equality: that equality means sameness rather than complementarity and difference. Every religion and every moral choice must be treated as absolutely identical rather than as different and complimentary. Consequently in the document the religion of a tiny minority, Druidism, is valued identically with the religion of the majority, Christianity and thus disproportionately. For the core of British culture is based not on Druidism, nor for that matter on an ethics of absolutist equality, but on Christianity, which values and respects complementarity and difference.

The British constitution and the British legal system was moulded over many centuries by Christianity and by the natural law. Today it is crafted by lawmakers and politicians, educators and health-care professionals, pressure-groups and media, business and commercial interests, for whom those common, traditional values have less traction. Christian values have now become post-Christian, secular values. Individuals lobby for what they deem to be economic, expedient, tolerant, liberal, respectful, non-discriminatory, inclusive and sustainable, but essentially that which enables them to create a life-style they believe to be true and good. Shorn from its moorings, the law is thus increasingly adrift. It expresses the will of the legislator, the will of the loudest and most powerful, the will of a policy unit or the will of the majority, and this relativism is State-enforced. As Michael Nazir-Ali has argued, public ethics are now determined either by focus groups or by an imposed, authoritarian utilitarianism which threatens to enslave people, to undermine traditional family life and moral values, to strangle the rights of Christians, and most egregiously to victimise the weak, the unborn child, the elderly and the dying.¹⁶ It used to be said that Britain is a free country. But, as Neil Addison asks, in ‘P-C’ Britain, can that be said anymore?¹⁷

2. The ‘Triptych’ of Pope Benedict XVI

Let us now turn again to the writings of Pope Benedict XVI. In his *Address to Politicians, Diplomats, Academics and Business Leaders at Westminster Hall* given in September 2010 during his visit to Britain,¹⁸ he explored the place of religious belief

¹⁵ See Equality and Human Rights Commission *Equality or Belief in the Workplace: An Explanation of Recent European Court of Human Rights Judgments* (2013) available on-line at: www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Rob/religion_or_belief_in_the_workplace_an_explanation_of_recent_judgments_final.pdf (March 2014)

¹⁶ M. Nazir-Ali *Triple Jeopardy for the West: Aggressive Secularism, Radical Islamism and Multiculturalism* ((London, Bloomsbury: 2012) 32.

¹⁷ See N. Addison *Religious Discrimination and Hatred Law* (London, Routledge Cavendish: 2006).

¹⁸ For the text, see *Faith Today. Special Papal Visit Souvenir Edition* (Stoke on Trent, Alive Publishing: 2010) 82-87

within the political process and asked where a solid, ethical foundation for civil discourse might be found. The Catholic Tradition, he said,

“maintains that the objective norms governing right action are accessible to reason, prescinding from the content of revelation. According to this understanding, the role of religion in political debate is not so much to supply these norms, as if they could not be known by non-believers ... but rather to help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles.”

Benedict rejects sectarianism and fundamentalism as “distortions of religion” since they confuse the right relationship between faith and reason. But, he continued,

“[w]ithout the corrective supplied by religion, ... reason too can fall prey to distortions, as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person.”

This is why the

“world of reason and the world of faith – the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief – need one another and should not be afraid to enter into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilisation.”

This point, that faith and reason need each other, was also made by Blessed John Paul II in his 1998 encyclical letter *Fides et Ratio*: “faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth”.¹⁹

In a later part of the *Address*, Benedict spoke specifically about secularisation and the eclipse or marginalising of Christianity within contemporary secular culture. Religion should not be seen as a problem for legislators but as a vital contributor to the national conversation. Some “advocate that the voice of religion be silenced” he said

“or at least relegated to the purely private sphere. There are those who argue that the public celebration of festivals such as Christmas should be discouraged, in the questionable belief that it might somehow offend those of other religions or none. And there are those who argue – paradoxically with the intention of eliminating discrimination – that Christians in public roles should be required at times to act against their conscience. These are worrying signs of a failure to appreciate not only the rights of believers to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion, but also the legitimate role of religion in the public square.”

The 2010 Papal Visit provided a rich tapestry. After much initially adverse attention in the media and some noisy protests during the events, albeit from a tiny minority, there was widespread goodwill, with at times evident religious devotion on the surface. In his address to the bishops at Oscott College before his departure, Benedict spoke about the need to proclaim the gospel afresh in the “highly secularised environment” (sic) of contemporary Britain. He then went on to observe that in the course of the visit, he had become aware “how deep a thirst there is among the British people for the Good News of Jesus Christ.”²⁰ Indeed, at the General Audience the following week, he said he

“could see how strong the Christian heritage still is and how active it still is in

¹⁹ John Paul II *Fides et Ratio* (London, CTS: 1998) 1.

²⁰ *Faith Today. Special Papal Visit Souvenir Edition* 118.

social life at every level. British hearts and British lives are open to the reality of God and there were numerous expressions of religious feeling that my Visit made even more visible.”²¹

Britain in his estimation is ripe for evangelisation. In his homily at Mass in Bellahouston Park, Glasgow, he spoke of the need to evangelise culture, “especially in our epoch in which a pervasive relativism threatens to cloud the unchangeable truth about the nature of the human being.” Summing up the Visit, Benedict said he had intended to engage with everyone in Britain in order to discuss the “true reality of man, his deepest needs, his ultimate destiny.” Indeed,

“the visit had strengthened a deep conviction within me: the ancient nations of Europe have a Christian soul, which is one with the ‘genius’ and history of the respective peoples, and the Church [must] never stop working to keep this spiritual and cultural tradition ceaselessly alive.”

Benedict’s Address at Westminster Hall is often seen as forming a triptych with two other papers he gave: the lecture “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections” given at Regensburg in 2006 and his “Reflections on the Foundations of Law” given in 2011 in the Bundestag, Berlin.²²

In the Regensburg lecture, Benedict explored further the relationship of faith and reason within Western philosophy and theology. On the one hand, he criticises theologians who downplay the rational component of faith; faith without reason leads to fundamentalism. Indeed, when God is understood to be Himself capricious and not, as St. John insists in his Prologue, *logos*, faith without reason can lead to violence. On the other hand, Benedict also criticises post-Enlightenment philosophers, who reduce human reason to the empirically or mathematically demonstrable. Such positivism systematically excludes questions about human origin and destiny, ethics and religion, love and happiness, relegating these issues to the subjective realm:

“The subject then decides, on the basis of his experiences, what he considers tenable in matters of religion, and subjective ‘conscience’ becomes the sole arbiter of what is ethical. In this way, ... ethics and religion lose their power to create a community and become a completely personal matter.”

This, he adds, is a dangerous state of affairs

“as we see from the disturbing pathologies of religion and reason which necessarily erupt when reason is so reduced that questions of religion and

²¹ Benedict XVI *General Audience* Saint Peter's Square Wednesday, 22 September 2010: available on-line at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/audiences/2010/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20100922 (March 2014)

²² See Apostolic Journey of his Holiness Benedict XVI to München, Altötting and Regensburg (September 9-14, 2006): Meeting with the Representatives of Science in the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg (Tuesday, 12 September 2006). *Lecture of the Holy Father ‘Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections’* available on-line at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg (March 2014). See also Apostolic Journey to Germany 22-25 September 2011. Visit to the Bundestag. *Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI*. Reichstag Building, Berlin Thursday, 22 September 2011 “The Listening Heart: Reflections on the Foundations of Law” available on-line at www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110922_reichstag-berlin_en.html (March 2014)

ethics no longer concern it. Attempts to construct an ethic from the rules of evolution or from psychology and sociology, end up being simply inadequate.” This is why, Benedict concludes, theology rightly belongs in the university and in a dialogue of sciences, and not just as an historical discipline or one of the human sciences, but precisely as theology, that is, as inquiry into the rationality of faith.

The Bundestag address on the foundations of law completes the triptych. For most legal matters in society, Benedict notes, the support of the majority suffices, but not in fundamental issues to do with the dignity of man and humanity. In history, legal systems have almost always been based on religion and whilst Christianity has never proposed a juridical order based on revelation, it has always pointed to nature and right reason as authentic sources. In the last half century, however, the idea of natural law has collapsed outside Catholic discourse. For many contemporary philosophers, there is an unbridgeable gulf between an “is” and an “ought” and, in the light of a positivistic understanding of human reason, ethics and religion have been relegated to the subjective realm. This cuts law off from its classical sources. Consequently, in Europe, Benedict argues, where

“concerted efforts [are made] to recognise only positivism as a common culture and a common basis for law-making, reducing all the other insights and values of our culture to the level of subculture, ... the result [is] that Europe vis-à-vis other world cultures is left in a state of culturelessness and at the same time extremist and radical movements emerge to fill the vacuum.”

On the other hand, he finds hope in the ecological movement. The young recognise that something is wrong in our human relationship with nature: that “matter is not just raw material for us to shape at will, but that the earth has a dignity of its own and that we must follow its directives.” Moreover, there is also an ecology of man too.

“For man has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will. ... He is intellect and will, but he is also nature, and his will is rightly ordered if he respects his nature, listens to it and accepts himself for who he is, as one who did not create himself.”

Benedict concludes by stating that there is

“a Creator God who gave rise to the idea of human rights, the idea of the equality of all people before the law, the recognition of the inviolability of human dignity in every single person, and the awareness of people’s responsibility for their actions. Our cultural memory is shaped by these rational insights. To ignore it or dismiss it as a thing of the past would be to dismember our culture totally and to rob it of its completeness.”

Indeed, the culture of Europe

“arose from the encounter between Jerusalem, Athens and Rome, from the encounter between Israel’s monotheism, the philosophical reason of the Greeks and Roman law. This three-way encounter has shaped the inner identity of Europe. In the awareness of man’s responsibility before God and in the acknowledgment of the inviolable dignity of every single human person, it has established criteria of law.”

In this triptych of papers, Pope Benedict has illuminated the role of the Church within a Western secular, pluralist culture and arguably bequeathed some practical proposals for the Church here in Britain. To return to the initial question, then, should Christianity still have a voice in the public square?

3. *Vox Ecclesiae*

In its two thousand year history, the Church has never before engaged with a secular culture. There will necessarily be an element of trial and error. Yet given Christ's missionary mandate to "go and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt 28: 19), the Church's prophetic mission is surely urgent today. In recent times, the Church has been calling its members to the work of new evangelisation, an evangelisation, in the words of Pope John Paul II, "new in its ardour, new in its methods and new in its expression."²³ Evangelisation is ever two-way, *ad intra* and *ad extra*, that is, Christians themselves being evangelized (*ad intra*), growing and deepening in faith, a life-long process, and at the same time, reaching out to others (*ad extra*) to propose to them the Person, values and teachings of Jesus Christ. Moreover, whilst evangelisation has as its proximate goal the individual disciple, its ultimate goal is to evangelise culture and its sectors, so that the Gospel of Christ might leaven the totality of human endeavour. As John Paul said: "the greatest challenge of our age comes from a growing separation between faith and reason, between the Gospel and culture,"²⁴ with vast sectors of contemporary culture from politics and economics to medicine, the arts and the human sciences, at present almost entirely 'unbaptised'.

The thesis here is that the Church must engage in a salvific, critical conversation with contemporary culture. Secularism is too flimsy a basis for British culture. It cannot guarantee human flourishing nor sustain long term the advances the British people have achieved, the great value placed on freedom of speech, freedom of political affiliation and respect for the rule of law, with a strong sense of the individual's rights and duties and of the equality of all citizens before the law.²⁵ Instead, secularism is producing a society without foundations, one that develops randomly on the hoof through pressure-groups, legal precedent and political expediency. Its ring-fencing of religion to the private domain, its dissolution of the ground of ethics and the basis of law, its amnesia of the past and intentional eclipse of its Christian origins, its relativism that fosters harmful ideologies and leads to the victimization of the weak, its positivistic reduction of human knowing to the empirically verifiable, its proven inability to support stable marriages and family life, its growing restriction on religious freedom, and its innate tendency towards greater surveillance and state-control, all suggest that the Church has a crucial and therapeutic 'anthropological mission' within 21C British society. The Church's task is prophetic: to communicate

²³ John Paul II "The Task of the Latin American Bishop", Address to CELAM, 9th March 1983; English translation in *Origins* 12 (4 March 1983) 659-62.

²⁴ John Paul II *Inter Munera Academicarum* 2, available on-line at www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19990128_inter-munera-academicarum_en.html (March 2014)

²⁵ These qualities Pope Benedict highlighted in his Address in Westminster Hall: see *Faith Today. Special Papal Visit Souvenir Edition* 83

the saving message of Jesus Christ as the ‘natural way of life’ and the authentic way to human happiness. The Church has to demonstrate how Christianity, not secularism, can offer individuals and the various sectors of contemporary culture a transformation of meaning and value that leads to human flourishing. In a word, Christianity proposes an authentic humanism, able to ground a free, democratic and pluralist society.

Christians must conduct the new evangelisation of Britain with a new ardour, with new methods and new expressions calibrated to contemporary need, and with a new expectation in prayer that God the Father will pour out afresh the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The first task is to demonstrate that spirituality and religion will never go away; the question of God lies naturally within man’s horizon and is raised spontaneously by human consciousness.²⁶ The next task is to help people encounter God and through His gift of intellectual, moral and spiritual conversion, to enable them to become intentional disciples of Jesus Christ. In this respect, the personal holiness of Christians is key: that non-believers encounter credible witnesses, who put their faith into action not least in service of the poor. Another task is to develop an effective Catholic apologetics, able comprehensively to rebut popular myths about science, so that schoolchildren especially can appreciate the interaction of faith and reason, the complementarity of religion and science, and the redemptive role of religion within human living. This apologetics should also address today’s hot button issues about sex, authority and the dignity of human life.

Last but not least, the most important aspect of the new evangelisation will be to identify, retrieve and promote Britain’s Christian patrimony, its history, art and architecture, its music and literature, its liturgy, theology and ethics. This includes taking the theological buzz-words of secularism and driving them back to their foundational values in the Bible and the Christian Tradition. In tracing the soft-values of secularism back to their Christian roots and exposing the ideologies that subvert those values, it will be important to promote a greater knowledge of the Bible, which underpins so much of English literature, and the Bible stories that have inspired British culture and folklore. Moreover, it will also be important to promote a greater knowledge of the history of the Church in Britain, especially of the saints who helped to establish and develop the Christian character of these islands.

Conclusion

So to conclude. Christianity should indeed have a voice in the public square, for Britain has been moulded over many centuries by Christian faith. The argument here is that secularism is too fragile a basis for a free society and that the Gospel alone can offer an authentic humanism able to transform human living. Of course, given the enormous challenge of the Church’s mission in Britain, it might be tempting to yield to despondency. Yet Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14: 6) and even at this moment, the Holy Spirit is at work in people’s hearts wooing them towards His Church. It is my own conviction that it is not the ‘product’ that is defective but rather,

²⁶ See B. Lonergan *Method in Theology* (London, DLT: 1972) 101-103

the ability of people in a busy, secular consumer-culture to hear its call. That is why today, standing within the great Catholic Tradition, if we are to communicate imaginatively the Person of Jesus Christ to the peoples of our lands and thus enable them to reach that true, genuine, lasting human happiness and fulfilment for which they long, we need to pray for great creativity. Indeed, may the Lord graciously hear and answer this prayer.