

EEA General Assembly 2013 – Session 3 – Social, Environmental and Religious Crisis

1. Europe in Crisis

We began our consideration of the crisis in Europe by looking back and seeing that Europe has been in crisis for most of the past 700 years, and reminding ourselves that previous generations of believers have survived and thrived in that situation. Yesterday afternoon we began looking in detail at the crises we face and have seen in crude detail the economic and political challenges we face, but at the same time some of the missional opportunities that present themselves. So now we turn to the other three areas of social, environmental and religious crisis.

2. Social Crisis in Europe

There are so many aspects to Europe's social crisis that I could have included many issues here: I have already made reference to the devastating unemployment rates in some countries but I could also have mentioned the widening gap between the rich and the poor and a marked increase in the number of Europeans in danger of poverty or social exclusion (currently 1 in 4 of the EU28). But these are really consequences of the economic crisis. So I have focussed my attention on three issues at the macro level which are, I would argue the main drivers of social crisis in Europe today.

2.1 Europe's Identity Crisis: Migration

There has never been a time in history when Europe's peoples were not on the move. Having said that the last 25 years has seen a huge increase in migration ever since the signing of the Schengen Agreement in 1985 which sought to give citizens of EU member states rights to live and work anywhere in the EU.

Northern Europeans have migrated to the Mediterranean. Eastern Europeans have migrated west and south, Poles to the UK, Romanians to Spain and Italy.

However, many countries have also accepted migrants from outside the EU. In absolute terms, the largest numbers of foreigners living in the EU on 1 January 2012 were found in Germany (7.4 million persons), Spain (5.5 million), Italy (4.8 million), the United Kingdom (4.8 million) and France (3.8 million). In total

some 6.5% of Europe's population are migrants (EU27) though in Germany, France, the UK and Spain the percentages are all around 11 or 12%.

EU countries have experimented with a wide range of civic integration policies ranging from the assimilationist to the segregationist yet generally with the common goal of “seek(ing) to bind newcomers to majority institutions and culture by requiring them to learn the host-society language and acknowledge basic host-society norms and values”¹.

And it is on the rock of religious values that many of these policies break apart, for some religious practices of migrants are fundamentally incompatible with values in the host society, for example, the wearing of the *burqa* in France. The only way assimilation to French liberal values is possible is by doing injury to the very civil liberty that the state seeks to promote.

Aside from the specific issues of integration related to Islam, this raises broader issues for all religious communities including evangelicals. The secular European identity simply does not know how to handle religions which refuse to bow at its secular altar.

2.2 Europe's Demographic Crisis

“Demography is destiny” said Auguste Comte, the 19th Century French philosopher and founder of sociology. Europe is in the early stages of another social crisis, one that is entirely of its own making – the aging of its population due to European's reticence to procreate. Despite the efforts of some countries to encourage childbearing fertility in every single state of the EU is below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman. The most recent official statistics showed that in 2011 the EU27 countries with the highest rates of fertility were Ireland (2.05), France (2.01) and the UK (1.96), all close to the replacement level of 2.1. The lowest rates were observed in Hungary (1.23), Romania (1.25), Poland (1.30), Portugal and Cyprus (1.35) and Germany (1.36). The principal cause of this is the delay in starting a family. In Britain in 1974 the mean age for a mother having her first child was 24, by the early 2000s it

¹ Joppke, C., *The Role of the State in Cultural Integration*, Migration Policy Institute, p.2, February 2012, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-11-034/EN/KS-SF-11-034-EN.PDF, Accessed 28/12/12

had risen to 27 and last year it hit 30. Yet if the mother is university educated the mean is 35 years.

The impact of these demographic changes on the future of Europe is sobering. In broad terms the current generation of adults is being replaced by one that is less than two-thirds its size. A recent Eurostat report² made some predictions of the state of Europe's population in 2060. In 1960 11.5% of Germany's population was over 65. By 2060 it will be 33%. The average age in Italy in 1960 was 31.2 years. By 2060 the average Italian will be over 50 years old.

In the absence of a spectacular rise in fertility, the only realistic solution is to facilitate migration but that is unlikely to happen in the current political climate. In the absence of migration the collapse in the birth rate will have a devastating impact on absolute population figures. Poland which now has a population of about 39 million people is likely to lose 7 million inhabitants by 2060, just under a fifth of its population. The situation for Germany is even more dramatic. In 2003 Germany's population peaked at 83 million. However, the historically low birthrate is already feeding through and by 2060 the country will have shed nearly 20 million inhabitants, making Germany a country of fewer than 65 million people³. Needless to say the demographic crisis will have drastic social and economic consequences.

2.3 Europe's Existential Crisis

In August 2011 Britain suffered the worst riots in living memory. They were not riots for bread, they were riots for stuff, meaningless consumer goods, often of very little intrinsic value. Much has been written about the contributory factors (social injustice, deprivation, poor relations with the police and so on) but most rioters had no political agenda. Rather faced with an opportunity to fulfil their consumerist dreams at no cost, they quite literally hit the shops.

As Zygmunt Bauman put it, "The fullness of consumer enjoyment means fullness of life. I shop, therefore I am. To shop or not to shop, this is the question. For defective consumers, those contemporary have-nots, non-

² Eurostat, 23/2011, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-SF-11-023/EN/KS-SF-11-023-EN.PDF, Accessed 28/11/12

³ Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009, <https://www.destatis.de/bevoelkerungspyramide/>, Accessed 29/12/12

shopping is the jarring and festering stigma of a life un-fulfilled – and of own nonentity and good-for-nothingness. Not just the absence of pleasure: absence of human dignity. Of life meaning. Ultimately, of humanity and any other ground for self-respect and respect of the others around.”

Or as the journalist Andrew Marr has called it, “the defeat of politics by shopping”.

What is the purpose of life for today’s Europeans? This existential question is not only about the future of the EU but of the very meaning of life itself. If Bauman is right and the inability to shop is the “stigma of a life un-fulfilled” then the prospect of a less prosperous future will have a devastating effect on the confidence and existential security of Europeans.

3. Europe’s Environmental Crisis

With the economic crisis at centre stage environmental concerns have fallen way down the political agenda. Putting it simply the calls for controls on greenhouse gas emissions have been drowned out by those who say the only priority for the world is to get back to growth.

Less than two weeks ago the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change published their 5th assessment report and they came to the following summary conclusion: “Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased. Each of the last three decades has been successively warmer at the Earth’s surface than any preceding decade since 1850. In the Northern Hemisphere, 1983–2012 was likely the warmest 30-year period of the last 1400 years.”

Global leaders have agreed to try to keep global warming below plus 2oC above pre-industrial levels, but most experts agree that even if governments were to fulfil their pledges and commitments we are looking at a rise in temperatures of closer to 4 degrees. At the end of last year the World Bank produced a report called “Turn down the heat – why a 4 degree C warmer

world must be avoided". It makes sober reading. As does Randers book 2052 which makes striking predictions on how climate change will impact Europe.

According to Randers, by 2050 it is very likely that extreme weather will be the norm – "from global warming to global weirding" – more drought in drought-prone areas, more rain in rainy areas, and more extreme weather- strong winds, torrential rains, intense heat spells.

The higher CO2 levels in the atmosphere will boost food and forest growth in higher northern latitudes in Europe moving fertile latitudes northwards. Randers thinks that sustainability arguments will win-out in the end but not fast enough to avoid damage to the planet.

4. Religious Crisis in Europe

Most of us are very familiar with the issues relating to the religious crisis in Europe. Decline of institutional Christianity in all its guises. Secularism predominating in the public sphere relegating religion to the private domain. Challenge of significant Islamic communities in parts of Europe where previously there were none.

Some sociologists of religion have argued that what is found in many parts of Europe now is "believing without belonging", though I have to confess that I find as much of the opposite in certain countries "belonging without believing".

For decades sociologists, politicians and journalists who have bought into the secularization thesis have been writing the obituary for religion in Europe but religion stubbornly refuses to leave the stage. Author's like Philip Jenkins whose book "God's Continent" I quoted from yesterday certainly don't see religion disappearing from Europe.

And two years ago I engaged in a detailed analysis of the European Values Survey religious and came to some interesting findings. Belief in God remains moderately high. In only three countries, France, Germany and the Czech Republic does belief in God amongst young people fall below 40%. Half of all Europeans and 41% of young people continue to believe that religion is "very or quite important" in their lives.

And other studies are finding the same. Here I want to point you towards a book written by a friend of mine looking at the Anglican church in the UK.

David Goodhew found that:

- The Christian church in London is growing both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the population.
- Most mainline denominations in the UK have experienced decline but not all, the Baptists having remained more-or-less stable. Weekday worship at Anglican Cathedrals has mushroomed.
- Black and other ethnic minority churches have experienced sustained growth in recent decades but have made only limited impact on the majority population.
- Church planting and other new forms of church are enjoying growth, yet they are absent from many statistical studies.
- Goodhew concludes: “British churches are experiencing both decline and growth. Britain has grown more secular and more religious in the last 30 years”.

Yes, there has been a crisis of institutional Christianity in Europe but of all the aforementioned crises, perhaps here at least the worst is already past. There is some light on the horizon. There is hope.

5. The Future of Europe

5.1 Europe's Societal Future (Randers and Kaufmann)

- Randers - Demographic changes provoke internal and external tensions
- Intergenerational conflicts on the rise – younger generation railing against wealth of old
- Age related migration – rich elderly increasingly migrating to southern Europe for economic reasons further reducing population levels in some countries.
- Further inward and internal migration will occur in response to population crisis

5.2 Europe's Environmental Future (Randers)

- By 2050 it is very likely that extreme weather will be the norm — more drought in drought-prone areas, more rain in rainy areas, and more extreme weather- strong winds, torrential rains, intense heat spells.
- CO2 levels in the atmosphere continue to rise at current rate of 2ppm reaching 450ppm by mid-century.
- The higher CO2 levels in the atmosphere will boost food and forest growth in higher northern latitudes in Europe moving fertile latitudes northwards perhaps by as much as 200km over the next century causing further migration

5.3 Europe's Religious Future (Kaufmann, Norris & Inglehart)

Kaufmann – Demographic Factors

- Fertility differentials will cause a resurgence in religiosity in Europe – especially among Islamic and Christian migrants; identity dynamics will make religion a symbol of resistance against wealthy secular elites; continued migration from global south will further bolster religious stocks.

Norris and Inglehart – New Theory of Secularisation

- Religion is a function of existential insecurity – the environmental, economic, political and social crises will contribute to resurgence in religiosity as liberal secularism proves incapable of providing the existential security it once promised.

6. Mission in Tomorrow's Europe

6.1 Mission in Europe's Social Tomorrow

- Mission to migrants and by migrants will accelerate – migrant churches will become increasingly contextualised; native churches will become increasingly internationalised.
- Demographic changes will make care for the elderly another of the principal activities of Christian mission.

- Intergenerational tensions and continued family breakdown will make the church one of the few intergenerational communities in Europe and a powerful demonstration of the truth of the gospel.

6.2 Mission in Europe's Environmental Tomorrow

- Environmental initiatives and engagement move from margin to mainstream of mission
- Mission increasingly virtualised – both because of technological innovations and because of cost/environmental factors

6.3 Mission in Europe's Religious Tomorrow

- Secularism, Islam and Christian will compete in offering hope to a resacralised Europe
- Dual processes of secularisation and resacralisation will continue – many churches will continue to disappear, many more new churches will be planted
- New types of Christian community will emerge to engage with this new reality

7. Europe's Secular Eschatology

Progressivism – pervasive ideology of the modern world that seduces everyone into thinking that tomorrow will, or at least should be, better than today.

Secular progressivism fuels our optimism in times of crisis:

- Economics – everything will be fine when we get back to economic growth
- Politics – EU expansion, political objectives of Euro
- Society – democracy, extension of civil liberties, rights
- Environment – technology will enable us to master climate change
- Religion – secularization will ensure that religion, and the conflict it generates, will become less significant in the future.

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