

## The Doctrinal Causes of the Current Religious Faith Crisis in the United Kingdom

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### Abstract

This work is an analysis of the causes of the decline of religious faith in British society through the birth and emergence of new doctrines and concepts such as capitalism, the Enlightenment, science and reason. As indicated throughout this work, the emergence of new philosophies must be considered as the main causes of the decline of religion in British society because it has encouraged British society questioning things that were never questioned before. Today, with the emergence of the religious faith crisis in the United Kingdom, many questions arise about its causes and its consequences. On the basis of these changing realities in the area of religious faith and practice, this article is very important because it tries to underline the doctrinal causes of this phenomenon. To conduct this work we decided to adopt two different methodological approaches: a descriptive approach and an analytical approach which allowed us to present and analyze the two different parts. The descriptive approach allows us to describe how the birth of new doctrines is impacting religion in British society and an analytical approach which is a particular type of research and involves critical thinking and evaluation of facts and information emanating from this phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Crisis, religion, doctrine, reason, Christianity

### Résumé

Ce travail est une analyse des causes du déclin de la foi religieuse dans la société britannique à travers la naissance et l'émergence de nouvelles doctrines et concepts tels que le capitalisme, l'Age des Lumières, la science et la raison. Comme indiqué tout au long de ce travail, l'émergence de nouvelles philosophies doit être considérée comme la cause principale du déclin de la religion dans la société britannique car elle encourage la société britannique à remettre en question des choses qui

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n'avaient jamais été remises en question auparavant. Aujourd'hui, avec l'émergence de la crise de la foi religieuse au Royaume-Uni, de nombreuses questions se posent sur ses causes et ses conséquences. Sur la base de ces réalités changeantes dans le domaine de la foi et de la pratique religieuses, cet article est très important car il tente de souligner les causes doctrinales de ce phénomène. Pour mener ce travail, nous avons décidé d'adopter deux approches méthodologiques différentes : une approche descriptive et une approche analytique qui nous ont permis de présenter et d'analyser les deux différentes parties. L'approche descriptive nous permet de décrire les impacts de la naissance de nouvelles doctrines tels que le Capitalisme et l'existentialisme dans la société britannique et l'approche analytique, qui est un type particulier de recherche, qui implique une réflexion critique et une évaluation des faits et des informations émanant de ce phénomène.

**Mots-clés :** Crise, religion, doctrine, raison, christianisme

### Introduction

Faith crisis in the United Kingdom may be illustrated by the fact that an important part of the population does no longer pay too much attention to religious practices. Faith Crisis is defined as a state of intense emotional and spiritual distress resulting from the discovery of Church history facts that do not align with religion. This distress results in members losing faith in some or all foundational truth claims of the Church itself (Clayton 6). This phenomenon has now taken a very rapid growth, and it should be seen as a serious problem because, no one can deny the fact that Christianity has been playing an important role in the United Kingdom. If we visit again British history, we can see that religion has played a big role for their becoming a big nation.

Today, two thirds of the British population have no real connection to any religion or Church and between 1979 and 2005, half of the Christian population stopped going to church on Sundays. British Social Attitudes Survey, the main social research tool in Great Britain, states that 57.7% of Britons declared themselves as having no affiliation to any of the religious groups.<sup>59</sup> The problem with the rest of the population, those claiming to be religious, is that only a minority actively practice it. In his work entitled *In Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without Belonging*, Grace Davie states

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<sup>59</sup> See the British Social Attitude Survey

that the majority of the British who claim to be religious and believe in God actually do not participate in organized religion?

Faith crisis in the United Kingdom is related to the fact that most part of the population does no longer pay too much attention to religious practices. The concept of crisis of faith is most commonly applied to religious beliefs; since faith is a fundamental tenet of many religious ones in the United Kingdom and the gravity of religious decision is perceived by many to be great enough to describe a period of extreme doubt as a crisis. If we consider British history, we can see that religion played a big role in it, religion was the center of everything, and all decisions were based on religion.

It is no secret that a large proportion of the British population consider themselves to have no religion. This has been a consistent finding of polls, social surveys, and censuses over the past several decades. In fact, the rise of the nonreligious is the story of British religious history over the past half-century. According to many surveys and documents, the United Kingdom is submerged by a religious faith crisis in the last year. Many British people no longer practice religion or have stopped attending church masses or do not pay much attention to Christianity. The British general Attitude Survey stated many times that British people are becoming irreligious. However, if we consider that the United Kingdom's history is centered on Christianity and that religious faith is a key point within its legislation, we will accept that it is important to underline the origins of the religious faith crisis.

In fact, authors like Richards Lo has sustained that the emergence of religious decline is centered on the fact that parents no longer educate their children to know and practice their religion. Almost a third (30%) of Christian parents says that they never read Bible stories to their children. Furthermore 7% do not think that their child, aged over 3, has ever read, seen or heard any Bible stories. In stark contrast, 86% of parents read, listened to or watched Bible stories themselves as a child aged 3 to 16 (Lo 274). However, Lawrence S. Cunningham sustains in his book *Faith Rediscovered* that the crisis of believes is most seen in young people and it is the fact that young men spend every Saturday night in the parties that is why they wake up very late and do not attend the messes of Sunday (Cunningham 18). The value placed on a young person's autonomy is one reason given for failing to prioritize religious transmission.

Before starting this work, the hypothesis we got was that there is religious change in British society because of the growth of modernity with the emergence new technologies. The plan of the work is structured in two parts. The first one entitled the Impacts of Doctrines on Religion in British Society focuses on the impacts of Capitalism on Religion. The second one which is entitled the On-going Influence of the Enlightenment will underline the influence of the birth of the age of reason on British people.

## **1. The Impacts of Doctrines on Religion in British Society**

### **1.1 The meaning of Doctrine**

A doctrine is a principle or position or the body of principles in a branch of knowledge or system of belief. It tries to establish new ways of thinking in the society. The birth of new doctrines has always created changes in domains such as tradition, culture and sometimes religion. In fact, everybody knows that the Industrial revolution took place in England. It was the starting point of many changes in everything in the world. As many historians of thought, economists, or sociologists underline, understanding capitalism requires a broad inquiry into history and the history of thought. It means there is a large consensus placing capitalism at the heart of modernism. Furthermore, changes in terms of mentality have participated in changes in every field even in religion. However, it is generally accepted that doctrines like Capitalism and the hegemony of reason have dismantled many beliefs that have never been questioned.

### **1.2. The Impact of Capitalism on Religion in British Society**

Given that no one can deny the fact that the faith crisis in the United Kingdom has many causes, it is important to understand that modernization and the birth of new phenomenon have brought many changes in every domain in the world in general and in the United Kingdom particularly. People struggled to live, and frequently in an undignified way, under the dictatorship of an economy which lacked any real human goal everybody is struggling to gain more profit. Pope Francis said “*Money has to serve, not to rule,*” urging financial reforms.<sup>60</sup> This shows

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/may/17/pope-francis-attacks-cult-money>

that the running toward money has become more important than practicing religion because of the Capitalism philosophy. In the United Kingdom and everywhere in the world, the quest for profit has become an important element in the structure of every society. However, the more people are running toward money, the less practice of religion it appears.

According to Oxford English Dictionary, the term *capitalism* was first used by the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray in 1858, where he meant *having ownership of capital*. The essence of Capitalism is credit driven by the mobility of capital; however, the essence of religion is purifying faith. Capitalism is often thought of as an economic system in which private actors' own control properly in accord with their interest and demand and supply freely set prices in market in a way that can serve the best interest of society. The essential feature of Capitalism is the motive to make a profit. In fact, Capitalism is an economic system in which human beings have to undergo a series of events. It deals with social, political, educational, cultural and economic changes.

Under capitalism, the price mechanism is used as a signaling system which allocates resources between uses. The extent to which the price mechanism is used, the degree of competitiveness in markets, and the level of government intervention distinguish exact forms of capitalism (Scott 5). This signifies that everybody aims at his own interest in the market and everything. Everybody's objectives are to improve profits; to try to have more money. However, this aim toward self-interest and the fact of being eager to have more profits, have pushed people in the world in general and people in the United Kingdom in particular to turn their religious beliefs into the abandonment of religious practices.

This may be explained by the fact that a human being is naturally selfish and always tries to have his own interest at the very present; but religion is a dogma; it is a belief. However, the existentialists do not believe in this theory, they live the present and do not believe in the rewards of religions in the hereafter. That is why most part of existentialists are also Capitalists and they always try to improve their lives.

In fact, with the issue of Capitalism and religion, we enter a vast debate which involves very different scientific disciplines, ranging from history and sociology to philosophy, theology and literature which already has a long tradition. Traditionally, religion or theology consists of the study of the transcendent or metaphysical.

In reality, there is one major thing in human being that Capitalism focuses on and which can be one of the real causes of the decline of religion and religious faith in the world in general and particularly in United Kingdom; it is the personal interest. If we look at again the British past, we will see Henry VIII was just animated by his personal interest when he broke with the Roman Catholic Church and created Anglicanism.

In fact, most of those abuses involved money, which means the effect of selfishness and personal interest which also are directly related to the spirit of Capitalism. In reality, the church was a very rich organization and men at the top, such as Cardinal Wolsey, were wealthy and lived nice lives. Church-abuses were used as a reason for the government to attack the Church during the reign of Henry VIII. There is a little doubt that Henry VIII was very interested in acquiring much of the wealth of the Church. This ended in the Act in Restraint of Appeals, which effectively gave Henry this power (the Act in Restraint of Appeals). At the end of 1530 all Churchmen in England and Wales were charged. This was a catch-all legal term that arose from 14<sup>th</sup> century when laws were passed that forbade all clerical from taking any actions that reduced the authority and powers of the Crown.

The industrial revolution began in Britain because social political and legal conditions were particularly favorable to change. There was particularly important improvement in transportation, such as faster ships, and communication, especially printing which played a key role in the development of the industrial revolution. These changes created with the birth of the Industrial Revolution impacted on British people's ways of thinking, on their priorities, on religion and on everything traditional.

The birth of new doctrines such as Capitalism has generated mental changes. Human beings have begun prioritizing the quest for profit under the practice and respect of tradition and culture. However, it is important to notice that Capitalism and religion are two doctrines that are impacting the human spirit by prioritizing money and faith. In fact, nobody can deny that, reasonably thinking, life on earth is more believable than life in the hereafter, working or making businesses in order to have money right now is more pragmatic than working or praying an unseen creature who will save you or reward your doings after death. In reality, this kind of thinking can be the perfect illustration of how the Capitalist spirit fights the faith spirit and religion.

Adam Smith's laws of the market are basically simple. They tell us that the outcome of a certain kind of behavior in a certain social framework will bring about perfectly definite and foreseeable results. Especially they showed us how the drive of individual self interest in an environment of similarity motivated individual self interest in competition; and they further demonstrate how competition will result in the provision of those goods that society wants. However, if we agree with the fact that Adam Smith's theory brings selfishness to dominate human spirit, we must agree that Adam Smith's idea may push someone to only focus on gaining profit at the same time, it can be related to the decline of religion, because, the fact of just focusing on gaining money may encourage a human being to neglect religious practices. That is why, the British attitude survey mentioned the fact that the "none" practice of religion is mostly seen in active people.

In nutshell, the birth of doctrines has changed the world in general and religion in particular. The religious faith crisis in the United Kingdom is linked with the birth and the growth of new doctrines such as Capitalism and others. It comes from the Industrial Revolution and a worldwide growth of modernity. However, we can sustain that British society is more influenced by the faith of money than the faith in religion and its practices. The capitalism system is overthrowing religion.

## **2. The Ongoing Influence of the Enlightenment**

### **2.1. The Essence of the Enlightenment**

The advent of new philosophies has created a different kind of people, as it largely determines their behavior and approaches to decision-making on particular problems and the rejection of old mentalities. Philosophy plays a significant role in solving global problems. Its main function is to form a world view, also to create an indirect influence on the development of practical solutions.

The enlightenment is an intellectual movement originated in the seventh and eighteenth century in Europe and giving birth to the vision of an age of reason for humanity as a whole. It occupies a central role in the justification for the movement known as modernism. The age of reason has transformed people, the way the world was before, but it is still influencing the behaviors of the populations in the United Kingdom and in the world in general. In fact, the dominance of reason thinking method



may turn someone's mind into faithless, because faith and religion are two opposite things that may dominate one another.

The Enlightenment, an era in which the foundations of modern science, politics, and culture were developed, is a period of extreme significance in examining this marginalization process of religion within British society. Although the circulation of these ideas was probably limited in its diffusion among the general populace, the Enlightenment produced many radical religious ideas that were nonetheless influential in changing the nature of intellectual religious discussion. The Enlightenment era has proved a formative period for new, modern religious ideas and discussions to emerge. Both the English free-thinking movement and the religious discussions of the Enlightenment can be situated within a larger cultural trend emphasizing reason as the ultimate basis of truth.

## **2. 2. Reason versus Religious Faith: the role of Existentialism**

The significance of Descartes and Locke lay in the fact that they were self-confessedly philosophical innovators. In Descartes's rationalism (the view that reason is the chief source of human knowledge), God is displaced from the center of philosophical thought and becomes the guarantor of the reliability of sense experience. Locke's more modest empiricism (the view that the chief source of human knowledge is experience) led to the development of a more "reasonable" approach to religion in which reason was held to constrain any appeal to divine revelation. Among, these there are many other forms of philosophical theories that have influenced and are still orienting people's tradition, culture and religion towards new practices and new mentalities.

When Bucholz sustained that England's, internal geography has had a profound effect on its history, we can believe also that British past and the disillusion coming from the paradoxes and irrationalities in religion field might impact on British people's minds and cause the decline of religion in the United Kingdom today. In reality, religion was very important in the United Kingdom because, it was at the heart of every activity in the past.

The church was at the heart of the village, socially and culturally, if not actually, physically. It was the religious center of the village, where Sunday services were held, holidays (holy days) celebrated, and all the important rites



of passage solemnized: birth (baptism), marriage (matrimony), and death Tim, (funeral). It had no competition: all were required to attend the Church, and Roman Catholicism was the only legal religion in England. It was the major source of news in the village. It was, therefore, the social center of the village, its churchyard the site of holiday feasting and church ales, Sunday and holiday's sports, wedding reception and wake (Buchotz 16).

It means the church was very important at the beginning of Tudor dynasty. The church was at the center of people's daily life; it was worshiped, respected and attended by the population. It shows also that religion was so much important. People were born and educated with religion. If we talk about Church, we talk about religious Faith also because, the respect and the importance given to the Church is guided and illustrated by religious Faith. Then, Buchotz's quotation denotes how British people were religious and how religious faith was in the heart of every action.

With the birth of the Enlightenment and the coming of the reason as a way to analyze and think, we notice many changes in the world in general and United Kingdom in particular. Today, when reasonably analyzing the reign and the behaviors of certain monarchs in British history, we can see many paradoxes, irrationalities, selfishness and unfair decisions taken by the monarch. Those paradoxes and unreasonable things are mostly related to religion.

However, according to Emilie Durkeim, religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them. Religion is the self-validation of a society by means of myth and ritual (Durkeim 47). If we refer to Durkheim's definition of religion and analyze the reign of Henry VIII for example, we will notice that he did take into account many things. For example, Henry VIII invalidated the ritual and myth of religion by breaking with Rome because of his personal interest. The unification of his people was also broken because of the fact that he created the Anglican Church. In fact, we sustain that the causes of the decline of religion in the United Kingdom today come from the past and are monarchical, because every population is rooted into its history, on the other hand if history got paradoxical and irrational elements that came

from religious domain, it influences the present because, religion is a question of faith and something which can be loosen because of irrationalities and disappointment.

Talking about Existentialism as a philosophy of existence, according to a widely accepted definition, Existentialism may be defined as a philosophic standpoint which gives priority existence over essence. From the dictionary meaning, Existentialism may be defined as “a philosophy of existence, it is an irrational trend in bourgeois philosophy which appeared in 20<sup>th</sup> century in an attempt to create a new world outlook corresponding to the frame of mind of bourgeois intellectuals” (Mososaheb 15). Existentialism insists that philosophy should be connected with the individual’s own life and experience. It should be a philosophy worth living. All this is blended in the word “existence”. In reality the existentialist philosophers concentrated mainly on inner experience of the individual. So, for an individual, the personal is the real. Philosophy therefore, should start from one’s inner knowledge, one’s own experience, which must be considered as evidence (Mososaheb 16).

Existentialism believes in individual’s personal experience; thus, it is considered as a philosophy of being, a philosophy of attestation and acceptance, and a refusal of the attempt to rationalize and to think the human being. But the question arises that does man’s existence has an essence. In the regard, existentialism is most commonly acknowledged with the modern French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre’s famous quotation *Existence comes before Essence* which implies that there is no predefined essence to humanity except that which it makes for itself. Sartre further added “Man must create for himself his own essence” Or, even more clearly: “Man is not, but makes himself.” (Sartre 7).

According to Existentialists, the human being as a being is nothing and he will not be anything until he becomes what he makes of himself. This is the first principle of Existentialism which is also called its subjectivity. Man, in fact, is a project possessing a subjective life and before the projection of the self-nothing existed. So, given that existence precedes essence, it is only natural that the man be held responsible for what he is. This first effect of Existentialism that it puts every man in possession of himself places the entire responsibility for his existence upon his own shoulders. Man is his own master. It also projects that man is free. However, Man’s freedoms develop from the existentialists called Atheists,

disbelief in God. Sartre believes that there is no determinism which means there is no God or any other power to compel or guide man in his choice. In other words, man is free or rather condemned to be free.

However, if we look at British attitude survey from the 2010 to 2016, we will notice that many British people do not believe in any religion. The most part of them describe themselves as “None” (Woodhead 245). Their attitudes of not believing in any religion appeared in Church attendance during Sunday masses. According to many published documents, British Churches used to be empty during Sunday masses. People no longer attend churches, because they no longer give importance to religion practices. In fact, it can be a fair analysis if we sustain the idea such as the philosophy of Existentialism and Atheism is spreading in British people.

Existentialist actions and deeds seem more heavily correlated with biological needs and events, whereas Christianity focuses more on moral actions. Both fields are methods of living and understanding one’s purpose, but there exists a fundamentally different approach that comes from the full or obscure belief in a “God.” The literal definition of “atheist” is “a person who does not believe in the existence of a god or any god. Most of their ideas are against religious ones. They develop theories in very reasonable philosophy. Their influence has become worldwide.

The birth of a new ideology has always encouraged certain people in every society around the world to change methods of thinking and behaving. However, the birth of Existentialism and Atheism ideologies may be a perfect justification of the decline of religion in the world in general and in United Kingdom in particular. In fact, many authors and scholars have sustained that British people have embarrassed these ideologies and philosophies. In fact, it appears in Linda Woodhead’s work when she states:

The “None” are rising in Britain in a slow, unplanned and almost unnoticed revolution. It has been happening for a long time, but the tipping point came only very recently, the point at which a majority of United Kingdom adults described their affiliation as “No religion” rather than “Christian (Woodhead 256).

The United Kingdom censuses, which have asked a question about religion since 2001, also discover a swift rise of “None religion” though

the report a smaller overall proportion of “*none*” in 2011, A third of the population of England and Wales, 44 percent of the population of Scotland (Woodhead 256). All these British Attitudes towards religion may be related to the fact that Existentialist ideologies are rising and occupying Human mind in the world in general and United Kingdom particularly. The fact of sustaining that the emergence of Atheism philosophy may be related to the decline of religion in United Kingdom, can be considered as fair analysis, because, as the most famous Atheist precursors and writers sustained, there is any dogma or absolute truth that should be believed without the analysis of human personal reason. However, nobody can deny the fact that religion remains a dogma, its teachings and recommendations have to be trusted and no need to be criticized. Contrary to the philosophy of Atheism, everything depends on personal position and reflection. Furthermore, the human being’s means of analysis is reason, and reason has its limits. In fact, it will be fair to take an Atheist position or philosophy, if we for example try to respond to these kinds of questions: how is God? What is the purpose of practicing religion given that anybody has ever seen God? All these problematical questions mingled with unfair decisions taken in the British history by the Monarchs such as Henry VIII for example, might push a British Protestant to become Existentialist and stop practicing religion. Also, corruptions and abuses perpetrated by Church rulers may be among the causes of the emergence of Existentialism philosophy and Atheism.

However, existentialism and Christianity cannot match because the first one always tries to dismantle ideas, theories and the recommendations of the second one. It is a battle of theories but Existentialism is too much based on reason which Christianity believes already surpassed. However, in this process, many people such as intellectuals have been convinced by the Existentialism movement that is why the religious faith crisis is growing up in the United Kingdom today.

## Conclusion

In a nutshell, religion is declining in British society. Many people do not practice religion; it is justified by the fact that British Churches are almost empty during all the Sunday masses. The causes of this phenomenon are different. In fact, the birth of new doctrines is among the main causes of the decline of religion in British society. Now, British

people have new priorities with the influence of Capitalism. Also, with the birth and growth of reason thinking method created by the Enlightenment and the dominance of Science, many British are no longer paying too much attention to the practice of religion. British people can be considered as “enlightened people” because of the fact that religion is being dominated by reason and people are becoming unreligious. Moreover, the settlement of the existentialist philosophy has played a big role to religious change in the United Kingdom, because they are encouraging the population to prioritize their own understanding of life. This phenomenon is shown by what is known as the religious faith crisis in the United Kingdom which may have many consequences on British society because religion is a fundamental element of human society.

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