

IS EUROPE THE NEW 'DARK CONTINENT'?

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Note from Pastor Kevin: The United States is following Europe in its spiritual decline. If we continue to do so, then the same despair discussed below will sweep our country. This in turn will set up the same kind of spiritual vacuum that existed in Germany in the 1930s, before a leader came to give them hope. The Bible teaches that another world leader is going to come to rule the entire world. It appears the growing spiritual vacuum is just one more sign that we are approaching the last of the last days.

CBN.com – (CBN News) - When the Gospel went forth from Jerusalem, one of the places it took root was Europe. And Europe became a center of Christian civilization for more than 1,000 years. But there are signs that Europe's Christian era has come to an end.

A big deal was made of the fact that the first draft of the new European Union Constitution did not include a single mention of God. But most Europeans act as if the Christian God of history no longer exists. Although Europeans say they believe in some type of 'God,' church attendance in most European countries is less than five percent.

Less than half of the British public can name any of the four New Testament Gospels. Almost a third of all Dutch no longer know why we have Christmas day.

There is a new 'dark continent'—the land that used to be known as Christian Europe. Today, many of its cathedrals are simply large museum pieces. They are 'artifacts of an ancient religion, and a dead faith.'

Jessica Elgood is an analyst at the British research firm, MORI. She said, "Our polling shows that large proportions of the British public still believe in God — concepts of a Christian God. But very few actually practice that faith through 'an organized religion.'"

She continued, "Only three percent of the public regularly attend church. And of those three percent, half of those are black—black Britons—who only make up about five percent of the population."

Richard Minter lives in Brussels and is a correspondent for *The London Sunday Times*. He said, "When, as an American in Europe, you tell Europeans that you go to church on Sunday, they look at you like a museum piece—something strange."

Minter also said, "There are more practicing Muslims in France than there are baptized Catholics. Out of a nation of more than 60 million Frenchmen, less than four million are baptized Catholics. A generation ago, that just wouldn't have been so."

Near Brussels, at Christian Center, an Assemblies of God church, Belgian Pastor Paul

Devos preaches to a culture that no longer believes Christian faith is the answer to anything.

Devos said, "In the United States, people would more quickly turn toward, at least Christ, in general, and Christianity, because it's still somewhat part of the culture, in general. Here in Europe, we have gone beyond that point, and people do not expect anything from religion, apart from some very abstract hope that there is something after this life. [They think] for this life, there is no hope to be found in the church."

Reverend Alan Baker is an American pastor at Christian Center. He said, "Something I hear a lot is an 'ancient spirit of hopelessness.'"

Baker added, "I've had people tell me, when they come off the plane getting into Belgium, it's as if there are spiritual hands around their throat. They just can't seem to breathe. It's a very heavy, heavy thing, a hopelessness."

It's not just a feeling. While most Americans say they are hopeful about the future, most Europeans in this poll admitted they are literally hopeless.

A poll conducted in 2002 found that while 61 percent of Americans had hope for the future, only 42 percent of U.K. residents had that hope. On the European continent it was even worse, with only 29 percent of the French saying they have hope for the future, and only 15 percent of Germans.

Miniter said, "The loss of faith, in Europe, is like an 'unseen black star' that still has a tremendous gravitational pull. They don't understand why their culture is failing. They don't understand why divorce rates and suicide rates are so high. They don't understand why so few European women have more than one child, and why on most European streets, you see more dogs than children. This is the impact of the death of real Christian belief in Europe."

Yet the European media never tires of mocking America's high church attendance as "something weird," or portraying President Bush's faith as a "weapon of mass destruction." In a typical comment, written in the *Sunday Herald*, the writer says President Bush is "under the influence of the crackpot TV evangelism that is so peculiar to America."

European elites are especially worried that Bush prays a lot. A writer for Britain's *The Economist* magazine wrote, "To Europeans, religion is the strangest and most disturbing feature about [America]." European elites worry that "fundamentalists" are "hijacking" the country. They find it extraordinary that three times as many Americans believe in the virgin birth as in evolution.

Elgood said, "I actually think we don't understand it [American Christianity] at all, and it's one of these gaps between our cultures, that actually leaves us scratching our heads at each other. We don't understand it. It hasn't been a part of our life here for 40 years." When Elgood's firm asked the British to name an 'inspirational' figure, Jesus finished at the bottom.

The Mori poll found that 65 percent of Britons named Nelson Mandela, 14 percent picked Prime Minister Tony Blair, 10 percent said 'none of the above', and six percent said Britney Spears. Astonishingly, only one percent named Jesus Christ as an inspirational figure.

Religion is an especially dirty word in European politics; many European leaders are

atheists. British Prime Minister Tony Blair is not one of them, but during the Iraq war, when Blair wanted to end a televised address to the nation with the words "God Bless You," his aides talked him out of it.

Some analysts say religious differences between America and Europe are reaching the point of driving the two continents apart.

But could Europe be poised for revival?

A licensed Christian broadcaster in the U.K. at Premier Radio, Managing Director Peter Kerridge believes the demise of the church in Europe has been greatly exaggerated. Kerridge said, "It doesn't matter how many *Times* headlines there are, saying the church is dead. The truth is, the church will never die."

Kerridge added, "We are seeing some decline, in some branches of the established church and huge growth in other areas of the church. In London, the black Pentecostal church is exploding. Huge growth. And one of the hopes for the church in the UK is the re-evangelization of England by ethnic minorities. "

But in Europe, evangelization can be tough going.

Devos said, "What I always tell the congregation, our congregation, is that if we want to reach out, it has to go *through personal contacts*. We cannot go ringing doorbells and going from home to home trying to reach them, because they do not trust us."

Pastor Baker says the hopelessness of many Europeans can be seen in a conversation he had with a successful Belgian businessman.

Baker said, "[The businessman] was trembling, with tears in his eyes, and he said to me—literally face to face—'Now pastor, if you believe the Bible is God's word, if you believe it's the message of life and hope, give me one reason, today -- give me one reason to go on living. If you can't do it, I'm taking my life right now. I can't take it anymore!' Then he says, 'Don't look at me that way. There's nothing wrong with me. It's not just me, it's my wife, it's my children, it's all our friends—we have nothing to live for'—it's all across my nation!"

Though the church buildings still remain, European secularists assumed that Modernism would do away with religion. But secularism has created a spiritual void, a vacuum in Europe that beckons faith to return.

There is a real worry that if Europe tires of this spiritual chaos, then the religion they will turn to is Islam. Islam is the fastest growing religion in Europe.