

**Article reprinted from *Cross+Way* Issue Spring 2009 No. 112**

(C)opyright Church Society; material may be used for non-profit purposes provided that the source is acknowledged and the text is not altered.

**LAMENT FOR THE NATION**

By Julian Mann

The vultures are swirling above the severely wounded creature that is the Church of England.

Her wounds are largely self-inflicted since the end of World War II – the leadership infested with theological liberalism resulting in failure to proclaim the biblical Gospel; multiple-choice liturgical changes that sowed confusion; compromise with the permissive society; latterly the ordination of women. All these have contributed to the desperate state we are in.

But that does not excuse the mockery and gloating over the plummeting attendance trajectory and the desire to exploit the hiatus left by the retreat of the Church of the nation.

At a recent conference on church planting in London, a well-known church planter, who identified himself as an Anglican, was reported in a reputable Evangelical publication as saying that the fact that denominational structures were failing opened up more opportunities for church planting.

In other words, yippee – the older denominations such as the CofE supporting churches serving local communities are having to retreat, giving us the opportunity to move in with more yuppie church plants.

I also heard the incumbent of a university mega-church declare at a conference that the recession would lead to false teaching churches closing down leaving the orthodox churches stronger.

I am as passionately opposed to false teaching as this gentleman but from experience can testify that the Church of England allows false teaching pulpits to be occupied by Evangelical preachers and thus for those churches to be reclaimed for Christ. Dioceses potentially going bankrupt because of the credit crunch will lead to the loss of these opportunities - so why crow?

What will happen to the elderly when the Church of the nation collapses? Will they be expected to commute to a large suburban church or a city centre church plant? Or will they be expected to have their own grey-generation church plant in their old people's home or their sheltered accommodation, cut off from the younger people they might otherwise inter-act with in a parish church?

Others also will fall through the nets of the suburban mega-churches and their off-shoots. If parish churches like ours in ordinary communities close, multiple potential rescue boats for the lost will be sunk.

Rather than gloating, isn't a more godly response to God's judgement on the visible church found in the book of Lamentations?

'How lonely sits the city that was full of people! How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave'  
(Lamentations 1v1 – ESV).

Cranmer's vision expressed in his Prayer Book was of a national Church with parish churches across the land where all and sundry could kneel at the same Communion rail, justified by the same faith in Christ and not presuming to come to this His table trusting in their own righteousness but in

His manifold and great mercies.

The potential collapse of that gracious vision is a matter for lamentation not gloating. May God have mercy on the Church of England.

*Julian Mann is Vicar of The Ascension, Oughtibridge, Sheffield. This item first appeared on the blog "Cranmer's Curate", ([cranmercurate.blogspot.com](http://cranmercurate.blogspot.com)).*