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WHERE THERE IS NO VISION

David Holloway

Talk given by David Holloway at the press conference to formally launch 'A Vision for the Nation : A Christian Manifesto'. This took place on 30th May, eight days before the General Election.

The present Parliament was elected by a turn out in the 1997 general election that was lower than any previous post war election. In light of that we need to notice that according to the polls, 72% of the population believe "Parties are only interested in peoples votes not in their opinions". Sixty percent of people believe "it doesn't really matter which party is in power, in the end things go along much the same". It is not surprising, therefore, that only 30% of people turned out in 1998 for the local elections. In 1999 with the European elections it was even worse with only 24%.

[Editor's note : With the exception of the exceptional 1918, no General Election in the 20th Century had a turnout of less than 71%. In 2001 the turnout was 58% showing the shocking truth of what David said at the press conference.]

The problem is that the party system is now becoming dysfunctional, and the important issues are not being addressed. The parties have become managerial and not visionary and the Bible says 'where there is no vision the people perish'. The public issues in which people are interested, over which they divide, and on which people want to be represented are in fact no longer the old economic and structural employment type issues. Rather, the issues which people divide upon are moral, ethical and religious.

The lord chancellors department very recently had a consultation. It said " recent trends in society indicate that politics is becoming more cultural or valued based". It spoke of a variety of issues including sex, homosexuality, education, religion, drugs and single parents as being the key "post-material non-economic concerns of public life". Most today agree on the need for a healthy economy, good medical care for all, less unemployment better living standards and environmental sanity. That is why the perception that "in the end things go on much the same which ever party is in power" is fair enough, at least in those areas. Most people realise, in their better moments, that no political solution to these problems will be perfect. So they tolerate genuine attempts made to get a better solution. Therefore, the party differences in these areas, the areas that are being campaigned on, are simply managerial. The issues that raise genuine debate and concern are visionary, about the meaning and purpose of life. These moral, ethical and religious issues are spelt out in our *Vision for the Nation*.

It is no good saying, as some do, that these are not the business of politics. For good or ill they have been made the business of politics. Over the last third of the 20th Century, following on from the Wolfenden committee in the late 1950s there has been the

propagation of the myth that law and government and morality are unconnected. Crime was not to be connected with sin, so there was a general liberalising of the law in respect of morality. But, far from there being a separation of law and morality we now have a range of enactments and regulations that have legislated for a new morality. These laws and regulations condone sexual promiscuity, undermine marriage, family values and morality and sanction the removal of restraints thus encouraging so-called 'alternative life styles'. Parliament has not legislated for 'no morality' but for a 'new morality' and a new set of sins and this has certainly interfered with private life.

There is still a moral majority. For example, 70% of men think that homosexual sex is wrong and far more think that homosexual parenting is wrong. These people are not just concerned about one issue, nor are they illiberal and unthinking. Let me quote Lord Nolan on adultery, another key area of morality, when he was chairman of Parliamentary committee for Standards in Public Life. Lord Nolan said "Of all behaviour which in my personal experience which has caused the greatest amount of misery to other human beings I would put adultery pretty high on the list. I don't think you can expect a man with the strains of public life to perform adequately unless he has a good home life to go back to, someone he loves and a family he loves and who love him. If you lose sight of the need for loyalty in personal relationships, if you decide that there is no need to stick to monogamy, I believe we will be in danger of losing the cohesion that holds the civilisation together". Everyone talked about his views about sleaze when it had to do with economic and monetary matters but not on moral grounds of that sort.

The moral majority now sees an attack on and a withdrawal of its right to have legal support for its moral endeavours. In the 1960s the received wisdom was that morality and religion were matters of pure personal and private choice or preference. We now realise how false that is. At the very least there is an economic price tag to bear. AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases cost annually the public purse £1 billion. From parliamentary statistics divorce costs £5 billion. Other costs, such as youth crime, single parenting, give a total of between £9 and £10 billion to the public purse. That represents one quarter of the national health service budget, or one quarter of the education budget. The social consequence of the sexual revolution are serious. A H Halsey, an ethical socialist and professor of Political Policy at Oxford has said "no-one can deny that divorce, separation, birth outside marriage, one parent families as well as cohabitation and extra marital sex have increased rapidly. Many applaud these freedoms, but what should be universally acknowledged is that children of parents who do not follow the traditional norm, (i.e taking on personal active and long term responsibility for the social upbringing of the children they generate) are thereby disadvantaged in many major aspects of their chances of living a successful life. On the basis of the evidence available such children tend to die earlier, have more illness, do less well at school, exist at a lower level of comfort and nutrition, suffer more unemployment, are more prone to deviance and crime and finally tend to repeat the unstable cycle of parenting from which they have suffered.

Some may say "how can you talk as you do in your manifesto when we live in a multi-faith society? You are talking Christian ethics." We are talking about Christian ethics

but also about what we call 'natural law'. This is something people of goodwill of other faiths and no faith can agree to, because it is basic common sense. Christians would say that this is living according to the maker's instructions. Moreover, we are not actually living in a multi-faith society. That idea is a fiction of educationalists and journalists. Of course other faith communities must have their rights and protections, but the recent British Social Attitude survey reported that in answer to the question do you regard yourself as belonging to any any particular religion. 51.9% claimed to be Christian whilst 3.1% claimed to belong to a non-Christian religion, and within that 3.1%, 1.5% claimed to be Muslim. 43% claimed to be no religion, and 1.2% don't know. One must remember that multi-faith is not the same as multi-racial; many of the growing churches in this country today are black-led.

We believe for the health of the nation these issues in our Manifesto need to be addressed.

Mr. Holloway then reported on the responses to the Manifesto from the main political parties.

“The Liberal Democrats have not replied - Gladstone would have been horrified. A spokesman for Tony Blair said that he was too busy and included a speech that was interesting but didn't deal with the specific issues.”

William Hague had sent a personal response which was read to the meeting.