

Selected Articles From American & British
Newspapers & Periodicals

美英报刊文章选读

下册

(第二版)

周学艺 主编



北京大学出版社

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II . **British Affairs**

Moral & Spiritual Decline

Lesson Twenty-five

Britain shaken by an ‘assault on traditional values’¹

Peers blame schools, business and the media for
contributing to national decline

BY ALICE THOMSON, TIM JONES AND JAMES LANDALE

The House of Lords² held an unprecedented debate yesterday on morality which had been urgently called for by the Archbishop of Canterbury³.

Peers from all sides spoke on the decline of standards in public and private life. Many blamed the media, single parents, poorly paid teachers, modern education attitudes and questionable business ethics for eroding the moral fabric of the nation.

Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach⁴, former head of Margaret Thatcher’s⁵ policy unit, speaking for the Government, said: “A moral and spiritual basis is crucial to our institutions and crucial to the family. If a family has a moral and spiritual core, it’s much more likely to hold together⁶. If a school has a moral and spiritual ethos to it which⁷ distinguishes right from wrong it is a better school.”

“If a company has integrity and responsibility and respect for individuals at its heart, it’s a better company and people will prefer to work for it. If a nation has standards, and trust is fostered within the nation, it is a better nation.”

He said that society had been shaken by the “prevailing assault” on traditional values. “With rising figures for violence, divorce, drug abuse⁸ and illegitimacy, it is hard to think that the spiritual and moral wellbeing of the nation is not in decline.”

Lord Morris of Castle Morris, Labour’s⁹ education spokesman, said that clergy and teachers would never be respected until they were better paid. “The morale of today’s school-teachers is not high. Neither is their pay. Their status and the respect afforded to them by society has been severely eroded and until all these are reversed, their formative influence on the children¹⁰ they teach will not be as powerful as it used to be.

“It is a sad fact that today respect is given to the higher-paid and the low-paid workers are despised. Teachers must not be in that category.”

He said religious education should be taught by teachers “who personally believe one of the faiths and practise it”. Moral issues must be part of the examination process and marks awarded dependent on the understanding of them. Parents should be taught about morals as well as how to change nappies.

Baroness Seear, for the Liberal Democrats¹¹, blamed the influence of the media, particularly television, which was watched by the average person for 27 hours a week. “That puts a most enormous responsibility on the television people. Television is a wonderful way in which people learned to imitate.

“How we can control this, I don’t know. But I want to put very strongly to the people who control television that their re-

sponsibility today is greater than any other unit in society I can think of. It can only be done by self-control inside the media itself. If I do nothing else today, I do want to draw attention to that.”

The Bishop of Winchester, **the Right Rev Michael Scott-Joynt**¹², blamed modern society for its “obsession with instant gratification”¹³, and the 1980s with its pursuit of competitiveness at all costs¹⁴. He also railed against “soundbites which were ultimately untrue”, and the media because they idealised infidelity, making it seem mature, fun and interesting¹⁵.

Lord Jakobovits, the former Chief Rabbi¹⁶, said it was right that the moral state of the nation should be put at the top of the national agenda. Agreeing that schools played a pivotal role in the moral shaping of the nation, he said: “If our children are raised in a moral vacuum then the essential ingredient of our civilisation will progressively disappear with incalculable consequences to the stability of our society.”¹⁷

We lived, he said, in an age of rebellion against all authority, with a belief that people should be nonjudgmental as though morality could be neutral. “In respect of children’s education we encounter much opposition to what is called indoctrination. We are told let children grow up to decide for themselves on the moral choices before them; let them discover on their own what is right and what is wrong. This is pernicious advice.”

Lord Elton, chairman of the 1988 Inquiry into Discipline in Schools¹⁸ and a former minister, said that self-discipline and self-denial were essential but now regarded by some as irrelevant and as a weakness. They were, however, at the heart of the Lord’s teaching¹⁹.

Because access to the mass media had eroded the influence

parents had over their children, teachers had a crucial role to play in promoting a virtuous and just society. "Teachers are the trustees of the nation's entire stock of useable knowledge.²⁰ What they do or what they do not do will have a profound influence on every one of their pupils. It is not just a question of believing what you teach, it is a question of living it²¹. "

Lord Campbell of Croy, a former Tory Scottish Secretary²², said that he lamented the decline in school assemblies with daily prayers. "They provided a simple opportunity to instil standards and indicate what good conduct in ordinary life consisted of. "

People appeared to be more concerned over what what was legal and illegal rather what was right and wrong. There were a number of issues, including commercial espionage and leaks by government officials, that were hard to prove in a court but which were, morally, clearly wrong.

Lord Pilkington of Oxenford, a new life peer and former headmaster of The King's School, Canterbury²³, said he had spent many years interviewing prisoners when he served on a parole board²⁴. Many were the product of broken families and had been abused by their stepfathers. They had played truant, left school without qualifications and had drifted into²⁵ crime.

"They had no experience of family life, no model on which to build loving relationships. These are the cases of a society which lacks an agreed system of values. Parents, schools and the society at large²⁶ have to try and build up a system of moral values in a society without any agreed ideology. "

However, the atmosphere in schools prevented them improving their moral standards. Part of the blame lay in moral relativism, a belief that there are no standard values, that morality is just taste or opinion, and in the belief that individuals are not

responsible for their actions.²⁷

Lord Moore of Wolvercote, a crossbencher and former civil servant, said that everybody reached a time when they questioned the origins of the universe and whether there was a God. "There is therefore a great responsibility on our schools to make sure that young men and women have received some spiritual and moral education before they go out into the world. Religious education should have the highest priority."

Many parents failed or were unable to do this so the responsibility fell on the schools. But he asked: "Are our teachers properly trained to instil in children some awareness of spiritual and moral values. Perhaps the greatest challenge facing our society today is the training of our teachers."

He also called for more religious broadcasting on television. "The most significant influence on children today is television but religious programmes on television remain very inadequate."

Viscount Caldecote, a Conservative, said: "Some people would assert that we don't need a nanny state²⁸ but equally we don't want a nation whose motto is: 'I'm in the boat, Jack, shove off'.²⁹ An amoral society is not a happy society. How much happier and more fulfilled would our national life be if the principles of the ten commandments³⁰ were more widely practised?"

The Bishop of Ripon, **the Right Rev David Young**, said that religious education and morning assemblies³¹ helped pupils to consider the fundamental questions of life. "It's the whole curriculum, the life of the whole school, that provides the setting for spiritual and moral development."

Lord Pearson of Rannoch, a Conservative, attacked progressive education methods and political correctness³² as a "cancer" in the school system. "The educational philosophies successfully

promoted by these destructive forces contain at least two fatal strands for an understanding of morality in our schools. It blurs the difference between right and wrong generally and it promotes the multifaith mish-mash of religious teaching. ”

Lord Pearson accused the Church of failing to offer enough spiritual leadership. “We are not getting that guidance, that spiritual leadership from established religions. ”

Lord Borrie, a Labour peer and former long-standing Director-General of the Office of Fair Trading, said that modern-day role-models such as sports stars and musicians had a responsibility for moral leadership. “They may not choose to be influential but whether they choose to or not . . . they have a responsibility to behave in a responsible and ethical way. ”

He argued for greater moral behaviour within the business and financial communities. They must not rely too heavily on law to regulate their behaviour as economic competition increased.

Lord Marsh, a former Labour transport minister and former British Rail chairman, said that neither he nor any member of his family held religious beliefs. Claims that society was on the brink of moral collapse were a gross exaggeration.

“Caring and compassion are not the preserve of the moral minority.³³ They are the natural instincts of normal human beings, rich and poor alike. I wish some of those who flaunt their personal sense of compassion, with somewhat tiresome frequency, would accept that personal wealth plays a major and essential role in a caring society. At the end of the day, after we have had the philosophical arguments, only industry and commerce can finance the solutions and only politicians will be able to put them into action. ”

Viscount Tonyandy, a former Commons Speaker³⁴, said:

“This country will never be able to measure its debt to dedicated teachers. If society has gone wrong, don’t put the blame on the schools. If society has lost its way, it’s because it’s lost its faith. How it lost its faith is another question. But undoubtedly our faith decides our conduct and our moral standards.”

Lord Ashbourne, a Conservative, said that the family had become a target of attack and was crumbling. Old values had been swept away and new humanist laws voted in³⁵. “The traditional family used to be a place to grow, find love and acceptance and security. Today the Department of Health gives the Terrence Higgins Trust—a sophisticated, highly articulate homosexual organisation—substantial funding, though mercifully less than it used to, and it has gained a marked influence on government thinking. New permissive legislation has weakened the traditional family structure and children in particular have become vulnerable.”

He accused politicians of having started the moral decline with the withdrawal of the prohibition on witchcraft in 1951 and new permissive legislation. “They then decriminalised homosexuality, allowed abortions, artificial insemination for single women.”

Lord Quirk³⁶, a former professor of language and literature, blamed in part the media for the decline in moral and spiritual standards. “It is not the schools which publish the xenophobic comics nor our teachers who wrote the headlines during Euro 96³⁷.”

Lord Cranborne, Leader of the House, summing up for the Government, said that although the majority of people were honest, generous and kind, in an age of increasing material prosperity the number who did not accept the moral consensus was worry-

ing. “The number that do behave badly is increasing and the cost in terms of social cohesion and taxpayers’ money is colossal.”

He emphasised that individuals must take responsibility for their actions, and gave warning against the economic dependency culture. He praised the family as the basic building block of society. Education was important in shaping moral values. “But I do think that schools cannot bear the burden alone. There are some of us who must help, above all those who are parents.”

Winding up³⁸ the debate, **Dr Carey** said: “This has been a very optimistic debate. We not looked forward in despair but addressed real issues with a sense of purpose.” There were three areas of agreement. The importance of nurturing moral values in young people, the central role of schools and teachers, and the duty of all sections of society — parents, the media and the entertainment industry — to exercise responsibility.

“You cannot take moral behaviour for granted. It needs to be redefined, re-examined, and nurtured again and again. It is my hope that we will find ways of strengthening the moral fibre of the nation in the days ahead.”

(From *The Times*³⁹, July 6, 1996)

New Words

abortion /ə'bi:ʃən/ *n.* 墮胎

access /'ækses/ *n.* means or right of using, reaching, or entering
(指对大众媒体的“接触”、“使用”，如孩子看电视、听广播等)

address *v.* to deal with

amoral /ei'mɔ:rəl/ *a.* having no understanding of right and wrong

articulate /ɑ:'tikjʊlɪt/ *a.* able to speak; expressing oneself readily, clearly or effectively

- assault** /ə'sɔ:lt/ *n.* a sudden violent attack
- assemble** *n.* a group of people, esp. one gathered together for special purpose, such as worship; an assembly
- Baroness** /'bærəniz/ *n.* 女男爵
- bishop** *n.* 主教
- blur** *v.* to make difficult to see clearly
- building block** *n.* any of the pieces out of which or on which sth is built (基础材料)
- civil servant** *n.* a person employed in all the various departments of the national government except the armed forces, law courts, and religious organizations (文官)
- clergy** *n.* the people who are members of esp. the Christian priesthood and who are allowed to perform religious services (神职人员)
- cohesion** /kəu'hi:ʒən/ *n.* the act or state of sticking together tightly
- colossal** /kə'lɒsəl/ *a.* very large in size or quantity
- consensus** /kən'sensəs/ *n.* a general agreement; collective or group opinion
- crossbencher** *n.* In the Houses of Parliament, an independent or neutral member, who belongs neither to the government nor to the Opposition (反对党), and who sits on the crossbenches which are at one end of the chamber at right angles to the main benches of the government and the Opposition (which face each other). (议会两院中的中立派议员) (*cf.* backbencher, frontbencher)
- crumble** *v.* to come to ruin
- decriminalise** /di:'krimənəlaiz/ *v.* to remove or reduce the criminal classification or status on (使非法的东西合法化)
- erode** /i'rəud/ *v.* to become worn or rubbed away (侵蚀)