

## **15. From the 1900s to now: Christ is still building His church!**

### **Introduction**

Acknowledgements: as in previous sessions, much of what follows draws on material by Garry Williams of London Theological Seminary, Ros Clarke, and Capitol Hill Baptist Church.

Let's read from Isaiah 9 – words that speak of God's promise to build His church. Then we'll pray.

*Isaiah 9:6-7a, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end..."*

### **1. Suffering, growth and decline**

#### **(a) The suffering church**

Of an estimated 70 million Christian martyrs to the year 2000, approximately 45 million died in the 20th century. Currently, it is estimated that around 100,000 Christians are killed because of their faith each year. While the church in the West has largely been free of persecution, Christians in many countries have suffered and died for their faith in vast numbers. We note: Communist regimes like Soviet-era Albania; modern-day North Korea; China; the Islamic world.

Sometimes persecution has been extraordinarily effective in stamping out the church. Sometimes, in God's providence, it has been a tool for Gospel growth. When Chairman Mao expelled the last foreign missionaries from China in 1952 the church was tiny. When, 30 years later, access to the country became easier it was clear that the church now numbered tens of millions. As Tertullian said in 197AD: "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church."

#### **(b) The global church**

At the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference in 1910, 80% of delegates were from the West. At the Lausanne Conference on World Evangelisation in 1974 there were delegates from 151 countries with at least 50% of delegates from the Two-Thirds World. That illustrates a shift in the church during the 20th century: Christianity is emphatically a non-western religion.

While the 19th century church was focussed on taking the gospel to new places, the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a movement towards the formation of indigenised churches, led by Christians in their own country. In South Korea, for example, the first Protestant church was established in 1884. Now there are 30,000 Protestant churches, the population of Seoul is 40% Christian and there are 238 theological colleges in South Korea, training Korean pastors for ministry.

Classically, we've thought of overseas mission as sending people "from *here* to *there*." Now, in a global church there is the need and the possibility for mission "from *everywhere* to *everywhere*." Here's an example: one UK-based agency is currently placing some Ethiopians in the UK to do Gospel work with Somalians. Why? It's the coming together of several factors: native Somali gospel workers are still very few; some Ethiopian brethren have a good insight into their language and culture; and England is one of the best places in which to Somalians with the Gospel.

### (c) The growing church

Although the modern church has seen unprecedented persecution and opposition, it has also experienced extraordinary growth. Note the percentage of the world's population who are Christians and the actual number of Christian people:

	1800	1900	1970	2000
% of world's population who are Christians	25%	34.4%	33%	33.1%
Total number of Christians	250 million	558 million	1236 million	2000 million

### (d) The declining church

Just 50 years ago, almost two-thirds of the church was in the West. Now less than a third live in Western countries.

	1960	1990	2000
% of Christians living in the West	58%	38%	31%

Church attendance in the UK has dropped dramatically in the past 150 years (although we do need to remember that it has fallen from an extraordinarily high level in the mid-Victorian era):

	1850	1950	1980	2010
Percentage of UK attending church	50%	10%	11%	6%

Thus, the non-western church is often growing. Whereas in de-Christianised culture church attendance is in freefall. This is the especially the case in old denominations like the Church of England, which is statistically facing future oblivion.

Numbers aside, what features do we observe in the church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century? How should we account for decline and for growth?

We're going to note two huge features: first, Pentecostals, charismatics and other new movements; second, Liberalism and anti-liberal theology. We're then going to sketch the story of Reformed evangelism in England and where it is that Immanuel fits in.

## 2. Pentecostals, charismatics and other new movements

### (a) The story of Pentecostalism

There are now more than 11,000 Pentecostal denominations spread across the world. Pentecostalism represents the biggest Protestant movement in the world, with more than 400 million members. How did this phenomenon come about?

The so-called **first wave** of the charismatic movement began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> The key events date from 1901 and took place at a Bible school in Topeka Kansas. Here Charles Parham

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<sup>1</sup> Some of its features are observable previously: e.g. the Montanist sect in the 2nd century and the followers of Edward Irving in 19<sup>th</sup> century London both claimed new revelation from God. Also, the "holiness movement" of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries taught a two-stage doctrine of salvation, according to which a person is saved by grace and then subsequently experiences the work of the Spirit leading to total sanctification.

taught a distinctive doctrine of baptism in the Spirit, including the idea that speaking in tongues was a mark of baptism. The real birth of Pentecostalism occurred in 1906 when the preaching of the African-American minister William Seymour sparked the Azusa St Revival in Los Angeles. This saw thousands of people speaking in tongues.

What were some of the distinctive of these early Pentecostals? Firstly, they were Bible people: the Scriptures and Bible doctrine mattered greatly to them. Secondly, their desire to be Biblical led them to read the Bible in a rather naive way: simply, they read of tongues in Bible and assumed automatically that such things were universal Christian experience. Thirdly, in the first wave baptism in the Spirit and tongues were more important than prophecy and the idea of fresh revelation from God.

The **second wave** began in the 1960s and saw the penetration of Pentecostals into mainline denominations. Many evangelicals moved into the charismatic movement (including classical evangelicals like Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who – because of his reading of church history – developed a two-stage view of the sealing of the Spirit. From 1967 there were even Pentecostals within the Roman Catholic church.

Many of the same features of first wave Pentecostalism were initially present. But increasingly *experience* over-rode doctrinal differences, such that you could find Roman Catholics and Protestants meeting together, on the basis of that they had baptism in the Spirit and experience of spiritual gifts in common.

The **third wave** began in 1981, as John Wimber taught a course at Fuller Theological Seminary entitled “Signs and wonders.” These phenomena, he claimed, always accompanied real evangelism. The subsequent movement shunned labels like charismatic or Pentecostal, and its members did not necessarily believe in or emphasise tongue-speaking or baptism in the Spirit. Another hallmark was a growing millenarianism: there was an upsurge of prophetic insights, revivals and claims that the end of the world was imminent.

Initially they tended to move outside mainline denominations (e.g. “Restorationist” churches in the UK). Groups included “Power evangelism”, the Kansas City Prophets, and the so-called Toronto and Pensacola Blessings.

An observation: there appears to have been a constant need for novelty – for new emphases (baptism in the Spirit, then tongue-speaking, then signs and wonders) and new groups (Kansas City Prophets, then Toronto, then Pensacola, etc.). Arguably, this reflects a need to maintain momentum in the wake of disappointment and unfulfilled claims.

This is the period that saw the emergence of the Hillsong churches, first in Australia and now globally. In the wake of the Toronto movement the “Alpha Course” (from the central London church Holy Trinity Brompton) grew in popularity and is a phenomenon in its own right. Again, it’s noticeable that Alpha has established links with non-evangelicals (both Roman Catholics and liberal Anglicans) on the basis of shared spiritual experience and their support for the course.

## **(b) Evaluation**

There is much that we can learn from some of our charismatic brethren, both past and present. John MacArthur – one of the more trenchant critics of the charismatic movement – observes a series of

lessons that we can learn from the charismatic movement. The first is this: that dead orthodoxy can never replace a warm and vital relationship with God.<sup>2</sup>

But there are also many reasons to be critical of charismatic distinctives. (See my paper entitled *Charismatic theology and practice: an assessment*.) In forming a view of this very diverse movement it is crucial to distinguish between what we might call “charismatic evangelicals” and “evangelical charismatics.”

The former are people who know and preach the gospel, for whom orthodox doctrine matters hugely and charismatic distinctives are peripheral (e.g. Wayne Grudem in the USA. Or Terry Virgo, of the New Frontiers movement, who has in recent years distinguished himself as a defender of the Bible doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement).<sup>3</sup>

The latter may be 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation charismatics who never had solid evangelical truth passed on to them or have consciously pushed that truth to the margins.<sup>4</sup> The Alpha Course – which runs in well-over 100 countries – has taught a new generation of western churches that evangelism is possible; but it has done so while holding out a truncated gospel with a diminished view of sin and God. Still others are heretical in the extreme, entirely devoid of evangelical or Reformed doctrine. In this sad category we have to note the likes of Benny Hinn and the “Word-Faith” movement. Tragically, the biggest churches in London subscribe to this erroneous doctrine.<sup>5</sup>

### **3. Liberalism and anti-liberal theology**

#### **(a) Liberal Protestantism**

Liberal Protestantism established deep roots in the second half of the 1800s. Its key principle was *accommodation to culture*, in order to make Christianity more acceptable to an increasingly sceptical society.

The 1900s began with extraordinary optimism and abundant human hope. The Enlightenment’s confidence in human nature and the confidence flowing from the achievements of the industrial revolution was reflected in Liberal Protestant theology.

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<sup>2</sup> See John MacArthur, *The charismatics: a doctrinal perspective*.

<sup>3</sup> Penal substitutionary atonement holds that the central feature of Christ’s saving death on the Cross was his bearing the wrath of God in our place.

<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem, who identifies himself as a charismatic, has expressed serious concern about younger charismatics. He observes that their parents and grandparents often grew up in Brethren churches and thus were steeped in the Bible before moving into the charismatic scene. Younger ones, he fears, have little or no Bible in their background.

<sup>5</sup> A significant group among extreme charismatics is the “Word-Faith movement” (sometimes called simply “Positive confession”) which is associated with Kenneth Copeland and Kenneth Hagan, and is taught by the Hackney-based KICC, which is not only the biggest church in London but in the whole of Europe. “Word-Faith” theology teaches that faith is a powerful force which both God and man can use. The force in faith can be released as someone (Christian or not) speaks the right words. The claim is that if you speak words claiming money, health, and spiritual success you will automatically receive these things, whereas if you speak a “negative confession” (e.g. “I’ll never get better”) you will do yourself harm. Whilst using some of the vocabulary of orthodox Christianity (e.g. “faith”, “God”, “blessing”, etc.) this is basically magic paganism which seeks to use words like spells in order to manipulate God and reality. Sometimes these “confessions” are accompanied by external rituals. This is probably not even Christian.

Optimism was briefly shattered by the First World War. The Great War was not “over by Christmas” as was hoped. The statistics are almost beyond imagine: the Allies mobilised 42 million men, of whom 5 million were killed. The Central Powers mobilised 23 million men, of whom 3.4 million were killed.

What was the effect of the war on the church? You might think that war would cause people to reflect on their mortality and lead to revival. But largely it did not. In the trenches, the padres were ineffective – overwhelmed by the horrors and unable to relate to large working class soldiers. Church going declined. The war made many into atheists, including the likes of a young soldier called C.S. Lewis.

Astonishingly, in the wake of World War One both liberal Christians tried to explain away the war in typical Hegelian terms: man is on an upward trajectory, and this was just a blip. They continued to display the most extraordinary and blind optimism in humanity, despite all the evidence to the contrary. The theologians of optimism in the inter-war period are known as the English Modernists (e.g. Henry Major). Theirs was a Christianity without need of “redemption” – and increasingly churches simply taught the goodness of mankind and the moral example of Jesus.

Liberal Protestants lined up with many secular humanists, who looked at the new League of Nations (the forerunner of the United Nations) as evidence of a bright and certain future.

But there were others – non-Christian pessimists – who looked at the hideous events of the War and realised something of the truth about human nature. They didn’t turn to the church, and had no reason to because of the church’s emasculated Gospel. Theirs was a literature of despair: Franz Kafka, Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell, the early T.S. Eliot.

### **(b) Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Neo-Orthodoxy**

The war did lead a few to an Anti-Liberal theology in Britain, Germany and the United States. Notable here is the German theologian Karl Barth. He was raised in 19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism, horrified by the way the liberals gave support to the war-policy of the Kaiser, and rejected their whole system.

Barth turned to Scripture, wrote a ground-breaking commentary on Romans, and then his colossal *Church Dogmatics*. He is a real mixed blessing to the church. On the one hand, Barth rejected the possibility that man can be the answer to his own problems. We need revelation and salvation from God. He was clearly anti Liberal. However, Barth did not ground his theology in the Bible. His commitment to the historicity of the Bible was weak. His understanding of the Trinity was unorthodox. His doctrine of Scripture was weak – he did not believe in the Reformed doctrine of Bible’s inspiration. His doctrine of election was peculiar (Jesus, he said, was the only one who is chosen by God and the only one condemned), and whilst Barth denied the charge of universalism his disciples in the Neo-Orthodox group moved in that direction.

### **(c) C.S. Lewis (1898-1963)**

Lewis converted from atheism in 1931, largely through the influence of J.R.R. Tolkien. He was a tutor at Oxford and Professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at Cambridge. Generations have loved him to the Chronicles of Narnia. But he was actually one of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries greatest apologists.

His war-time addresses became the popular classic *Mere Christianity*. He is a model communicator of complete truth: brilliant and crystal clear. In *Fern-seed and Elephants* he attacks the arrogance and folly of New Testament critical studies.

He was a clear anti-Liberal. But – like Barth – he was theologically very mixed. According to Lewis we cannot know *how* the atoning death of Jesus actually saves us. He believed in the Roman Catholic doctrines of purgatory and prayers for the dead. Lovers of Narnia will recall (with great distress) how in the *Last Battle* Lewis uses a conversation between Aslan the Lion and the noble pagan warrior Emet (whose name, perhaps significantly, is the Hebrew noun for “truth”) to illustrate something very close to universal salvation.

#### **(d) Anti-Liberalism in the United States**

Alarmed at liberal attacks on the Bible and historic Christianity, a band of Christian scholars made a stand for orthodoxy. They produced *The Fundamentals* – A series of essays written between 1910 and 1915. Leading pastors and theologians set aside their differences and united to make a defence of the faith. The group was denominationally diverse including the venerable Princeton Presbyterian B.B. Warfield, the Southern Baptist leader E.Y. Mullins, the evangelist Reuben Torrey, and the dispensationalist C.I. Scofield.

The cardinal doctrine they united on against the assault of the modernists: the inspiration, authority, and inerrancy of the Bible.

How do we get from The Fundamentals to Fundamentalists? The term originally had a rather precise meaning of those who affirmed the foundational doctrines of orthodoxy; it soon, however, came to be used more broadly and more disparagingly, as it is today, to refer to militancy, intolerance, isolationism, anti-intellectualism.

There is some truth in those charges. But in the 1920s and 1930s it was self-identified Fundamentalists who fought against the liberal modernists over denominations and seminaries. Largely, the modernists won. But out of apparent defeat great new tools for Gospel growth emerged.

One of the giants of 20<sup>th</sup> century church history is **J Gresham Machen (1881-1937)**. He was a professor at Princeton (home to many of the defenders of orthodoxy in America at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – men like B.B. Warfield and the Hodges). In 1923 he wrote a crucial book called *Christianity and Liberalism*. He argued that the fundamentalist-modernist dispute was not between two interpretations of Christianity, but between two entirely different religions. He was absolutely right, and his diagnosis remains true to this day: liberal Christianity is not Christianity.

Princeton went liberal, so Machen and others left to found Westminster Theological Seminary. This was a milestone moment in American church history. He also left the now-liberal Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA) and helped establish the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Machen, Westminster, and later greats like Carl Henry (1913-2003) helped establish the foundation for a new Reformed movement in the USA. They fought against some of the anti-intellectual and separatist tendencies in fundamentalism.

Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century men like Albert Mohler (1959- ) and Mark Dever (1960- ) helped rescued the Southern Baptists from destruction by the liberals. Their rigour and depth help explain why the church in the USA ended the 20<sup>th</sup> century arguably in much better health than the church in Britain.

#### **4. The story of the 20<sup>th</sup> century British church**

##### **(a) parachurch movements in the U.K.**

At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the state of local churches was very often poor. That's one reason why we thank God very much for the student Christian Union movement, what's now called **the UCCF (Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship)**. They displayed a clarity and a courage too often lacking in local churches.

A key moment took place at Trinity College Cambridge, in 1919. The CICCUC (Cambridge Inter-Collegiate Christian Union) had disaffiliated from the Student Christian Movement in 1910 over SCM's liberal tendencies. After the War the CICCUC found itself much smaller than the SCM, whose leadership hoped that the CICCUC would rejoin. The CICCUC's secretary was Normal Grubb (an army officer both wounded and decorated in the Great War, who would marry the daughter of C.T. Studd). He asked the SCM's secretary directly, "Does the SCM put the atoning blood of Jesus Christ central?" According to Grubb, Rollo Pelly hesitated, and then said, "Well, we acknowledge it, but not necessarily central." Grubb was there with Daniel Dick, the CICCUC president. Grubb wrote: "Dan Dick and I then said that this settled the matter for us in CICCUC. We could never join something that did not maintain the atoning blood of Jesus Christ as its centre; and we parted company'."

It's no exaggeration to say that the clarity and courage of those men saved English evangelicalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From the CICCUC was born the Inter-Varsity Fellowship, and later the UCCF. It has played a critical role in evangelising students with the true Gospel and in discipling Christian students.

The story of English conservative evangelicalism can't be told without reference to **the Bash Camps**. These were, Christian summer camps started by Eric Nash, a Scripture Union staff worker. His ambition was to evangelise and disciple boys and girls from the country's leading independent schools in the little village of Iwerne Minister. His aim was to reach the few, to reach the many.

The camps were run with military precision (both a strength and a weakness). They taught a simple, clear, conservative Bible doctrine at a time when the Church of England hated such teaching. Indeed, much of the year-round work in the boarding schools had to happen covertly.

The camps still run today, and are enormously effective, aided by year-round youth work by Christian teachers in some of the UK's leading boarding schools. Those influenced by the camps include: John Stott, Dick Lucas, Vaughan Roberts, William Taylor, Richard Bewes, Jonathan Fletcher, David Fletcher, and many others. Most of the men who disciplined me both at university and afterwards were products of the Iwerne camps.

Old boys who – sadly – have left behind the clarity of their Iwerne years include Nicky Gumbel and Justin Welby.

We can't ignore the **Billy Graham Crusades** first ran in Britain in 1954. Over the course of three months more than 38,000 people went forward and professed faith. That might discourage us, today, in a time of smaller things. It's important to remember, though, that the growth of the early church did not come about through mass evangelism, but through faithful Christians living godly lives and witnessing personally to the Gospel of Jesus.

### **(b) Strengths and weaknesses in the Church**

British **theological colleges** were poor for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and faithful ministers – both Anglican and free church – often regarded scholarship and learning as suspicious activities: the preserve of the liberal.

Commonly, a young man would get converted, be discipled through summer camps, train at a liberal theological college where he rightly ignored poisonous liberal lectures, get ordained, serve a church with a faithful and simple gospel that he learned through summer camps – and often lead that church rather in the style of a summer camp.

Sometimes there was the absence of a deep and Reformed theological framework. Often, the response to liberalism and modernity was less clear and less deep in the British church than it was in parts of the American church.

**Key names** to note include:

- Martyn Lloyd Jones (1899-1981). Largely based at London's Westminster Chapel, Lloyd-Jones influenced a generation at a time when liberalism was bold and it was assumed that no-one believed in the verbal inspiration of Scripture. He did this through his deep Bible preaching, by bringing a theological backbone to post-War evangelicalism (together with Douglas Johnson and the IVF), and he connected a new generation to the works of the Puritans with their dual emphasis on a Reformed and Calvinistic theology *and* an experiential knowledge of God.
- John Stott (1921-2011) served for most of his ministry at All Soul's Langham Place. He was a renowned Bible expositor and evangelical statesman.
- J.I. Packer (1926- ) was a reformed theologian serving in Oxford and Bristol, and since 1979 from Regent College in Vancouver.

None of these men were perfect. Each had flaws. And they were at the heart of **a sad division** that occurred in the mid-1960s. The older denominations – notably the Church of England – were declining into gross forms of liberalism. And Lloyd-Jones, the independent and non-conformist minister, stood up at the National Evangelical Assembly in 1966 and told the Anglican evangelicals that they ought to leave. Some did, though not many. Stott reacted furiously. Relations between Anglican evangelicals and free church evangelicals were strained for 20 years or more.

A key development in bringing back together conservatives from the Church of England and the non-conformist churches was the establishment of **The Proclamation Trust**, founded in 1986 by Dick Lucas (then Rector of St Helen's Bishopsgate) and David Jackman (then the minister of Above Bar Church in Southampton). The ProcTrust aims to grow expository Bible ministry in local churches which are committed to Reformed theology. One happy by-product is that it draws together brothers and sisters from Anglican and free church settings.



During this time **Oak Hill Theological College** underwent a renaissance. Prof David Peterson brought the college back to its conservative roots. His successor, the late Dr Mike Ovey taught deep Reformed theology to a generation including myself – and he taught us to think.

### **Conclusion: The future?**

What about **the future** for a church like Immanuel?

We don't know the future, but the trajectory of the Church of England gives us no reason for hope whatsoever. Churches like Immanuel are considering denominational re-alignment.

The simple fact is, a church like Immanuel Church Brentwood has much more in common with non-Anglican churches in the conservative evangelical tradition, be they Reformed Baptists, Presbyterians, or Independents.

One of the tenets of the Reformation is this: *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* – “the Reformed church is always reforming.” We are never the church that our Lord wants us to be.

There'll be errors to avoid – in doctrine and in life.

There is a Reformed historical tradition in which we want to take our place – Lord, make us worthy of it: of Augustine, Calvin, Luther, Cranmer, the Puritans.

But above all, like each of those men, we're to be people of the church and people of the book. He wants us to love and serve the local church. And he wants us to preach the Word, in season and out of season – from the pulpit, and from the mouths of church members wherever it is He places us.

There is much of which we are uncertain. But we can be sure of this: “Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end.” Christ wins!

And what of the End to which Christ will surely bring us? Let's finish with the closing words of *The City of God*, in which our brother Augustine – writing 1600 years ago – surveyed the work of God in history:

*[We look to] the eternal rest not only of the spirit but of the body also. There we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Behold what will be, in the end, without end! For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?*

*And now, as I think, I have discharged my debt, with the completion, by God's help, of this huge work. It may be too much for some, too little for others. Of both these groups I ask forgiveness. But of those for whom it is enough I make this request: that they do not thank me, but join with me in rendering thanks to God. Amen. Amen.*