

## Chapter One

### The Church and the World Today

*Purpose:* To begin the process of seeing the bigger picture by a reflection on the Church and the world today by focusing on the events and trends since approximately 1900. It is important to recognize the remarkable works of the Holy Spirit during this time, as well as noting the massive evils; the human and social context in which conflicting forces have been at work is also significant, with all the huge changes in society produced by technological progress, political changes and the impact of the mass media and new forms of communication. One purpose is to get the young people thinking outside their normal circle or world, beyond their nation and beyond their personal memories. It is also encourage them to think critically about the world in which they live and to bring some spiritual and moral principles into their assessment.

*Presentation:* Normally this teaching has begun by asking the participants such questions as:

1. What were the major moves/acts of the Holy Spirit in the 20<sup>th</sup> century?
2. What were the most evident displays of unmasked evil in that century?
3. What have been the most marked changes in society throughout the world during this same period?

Sometimes variations have been included such as asking who were the most influential Christians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A flipchart or blackboard has always been used to list and categorise the responses. The answers to this last question have generally varied much more than those to the three questions above with answers often revealing how much young people today are influenced by the media focus on celebrities.

To facilitate understanding, I will begin this written presentation with major trends in the world and in society before treating of the works of the Holy Spirit and the rise of major evils. In oral presentations, we have normally followed the order indicated above. This written order aims to show the relationship between developments in the world and developments in world Christianity.

#### Major Trends in the World of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

*Growing Secularization.* Secularization is the process whereby areas of life in society become independent of religious beliefs and subject only to human reason and the empirical sciences. This process which first arose in Europe was historically a reaction to the wars of religion between Catholic and Protestant powers. As no common ground could be found basic on distinctively Christian principles, the cohesion of society had to prescind from religion and be based on reason and common sense. This applied to all areas of public life from scientific knowledge to industry and politics, from education to health-care, from finance to economics. In an increasingly secularized world, anti-religious philosophies developed leading to explicit forms of atheist ideology (which can sometimes be called secularism). From atheist philosophies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century came atheist regimes in the 20<sup>th</sup>, so that for the first time in the history of the Church, practice of Christian faith is made illegal in officially atheist nations, even going so far as the destruction of all

places of worship in Albania. Today in Britain militant atheists have become more aggressive in their denunciations of Christian faith, going so far as to see it as a social evil.

*Scientific Technological Advance.* The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen huge advances in human knowledge, with many new sciences emerging. The increased knowledge based on amazing new discoveries leads to new forms of technology (in satellites, the use of robots, in manufacture, in construction, computer-aided design, labour-saving devices), new instruments and treatments for diseases (anti-biotics, multi-dimensional scans, laser surgery), new and accelerated means of travel (air travel, jet planes, low-cost airlines, high-speed rail), new and more rapid forms of communication (internet, mobile phones with increasing capacities, blackberries).

*Globalization.* The scientific and technological advance has helped to produce the phenomenon of “globalization”. People sometimes now talk of the world as “one global village”. This process of constant and instant global-wide interaction is seen a virtual all levels of society. So an event in any part of the world can be reported in seconds all over the world. Both big business and big crime have become internationalized. Money can be moved anywhere at the click of a mouse. This is too recent a development for people to have grasped and analysed all the consequences. But it is clear, for example, that national governments no longer possess the power and authority over their people that they once possessed. When government try to assert their own authority, to enforce controls or to levy taxes, business leaders move their trade and activities to more amenable lands. Does this process of globalization produce a monochrome, probably pop, culture across the world? In one sense yes, because pop music and fashion trends spread across national boundaries. But in another sense, globalization seems to be provoking a nationalist backlash in which peoples develop increasing resistance to what is perceived as foreign and alien.

*Decolonization.* Another way in which the world has changed dramatically in the last century is the end of colonial political power, which began to suddenly collapse after the Second World War, and especially in the 1960s. The Western European powers are no longer colonial powers, though they mostly retain major links with their former colonies with greater or lesser tension. A major common bond is language for the former colonies often retain the tongue of their former colonial masters as the or a major language, often because the artificially-imposed colonial boundaries embraced many tribal language groups. Instead of the colonies, we have “developed” and “developing” nations, with the G8 having expanded into the G20, with Brazil, India, and China becoming major league players on the world stage.

*Totalitarianism and Democracy.* During the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a major trend towards democracy with universal suffrage (one person, one vote) as the professed ideal in many nations. The thirst for democracy was no doubt heightened by the experience of two devastating world wars (1914 - 18, 1939 - 45) and the threat of new totalitarian regimes that suffocated human freedom and subordinated all public life to the ideology of the state. One of the most ideological tyrannies was Nazi Germany, that provoked the Second World War. This was quickly followed by the spread of Soviet Communism over Eastern Europe and of Marxist-Leninist materialism also in China. Nazism and Communism, Soviet and Chinese, both massacred millions of the peoples they subjected, with Nazi anti-Judaism leading to the slaughter of 6 million Jews, and Soviet power displacing and decimating whole populations. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many tyrannical dictators have ruled their captive nations but with lesser international ramifications than with the Nazis and the Soviets. At the same time, there has been a resurgence of

fundamentalist Islam with radical Islam and Islamic terrorism becoming a major threat to world order and stability. Nonetheless democracy has continued to spread, though with ups and downs, so that most totalitarian regimes feel the need to present a democratic façade.

In recent years the explosive issue most threatening the peace of the world is the Israeli - Palestinian conflict, that is barely separable from Israeli - Islamic hostility. This maelstrom is a development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century associated with the return of the Jewish people to the land, and the formation of the state of Israel in 1948. This conflict is clearly religious as well as political. It involves theological issues as well as moral principles. Whatever one's theology or eschatology, it involves the exegesis of the Bible and the interpretation of biblical prophecy. These issues will be treated in later chapters.

### The Major Moves/Acts of the Holy Spirit in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

*The Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements.* This distinctively 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon usually comes quickly in the responses, since these meetings and their ecumenical or inter-church character have been made possible through this Holy Spirit event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is helpful to list the Pentecostal and the charismatic together because of their obvious affinity and interaction. However, they need to be distinguished and a brief account of the major differences given at this stage, while adding that the differences will be further explained later in subsequent teachings.

*The Ecumenical Movement.* Where the majority come from historic church backgrounds, the ecumenical movement will be mentioned by some. But where the majority come from Evangelical and Pentecostal backgrounds, some further reasons why the ecumenical movement is a work of the Holy Spirit need to be given, because of the widespread opposition to or suspicion of ecumenism among these Christians. It can be mentioned that both these movements arose in the beginnings of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Topeka, Kansas in 1901 and especially Azusa Street, Los Angeles in 1906 for the Pentecostal movement and Edinburgh 1910 being generally considered as the birth of the ecumenical movement. However, as with all such new developments, there are always antecedents that are, often later, seen as preparing the way, especially in small hidden groups of intercessors and praying believers.

*Holy Spirit Revival/Renewal and Christian Unity.* It can be important to explain that these two movements, Pentecostal-charismatic and ecumenical, which are likely in retrospect to be seen as key features of 20<sup>th</sup> century Christianity, have until recent times taken very little notice of each other. However, both these movements have changed the face of world Christianity. Today it is increasingly recognised that the continents where Christian growth is most marked are Africa, Asia and Latin America, and in all three there has been a huge explosion of Pentecostal and/or charismatic faith-expressions. In consequence, an observer like Philip Jenkins sees the centre of gravity of the Christian world moving south in what is being called "the shift to the global south" and makes the confident prediction that the Christianity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be overwhelmingly Pentecostal - charismatic. But it is also true that the ecumenical movement has transformed inter-church relations, even though there is widespread disappointment over its slow rate of progress towards unity. So for example, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century most church leaders never met their opposite numbers in other churches (except between some free churches that formed and supported inter-denominational Protestant agencies), but Catholic bishops never met other church leaders and none of them visited the Pope in Rome before 1960.

Both these movements are fundamentally works of the Holy Spirit, because their core convictions have to come from the Spirit of God: the salient characteristics of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements - spontaneous praise of the Lord, a love of the Scriptures, a zeal for evangelism, a heightened sense of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over the Church and over all things - none of these things can be simulated on a vast scale by any merely worldly or diabolical source. Likewise, the heart and longing for Christian unity, the sense of the sin and scandal in divisions and strife between Christians, the launching of prayer initiatives for unity that win over many Christians, none of these can be produced by merely human effort or diabolical counterfeit. So presenting these two movements as fundamentally works of the Holy Spirit is saying that their basic inspiration and their first impulses come from the Holy Spirit. It is not claiming that everything that later happens under their banner is from the Holy Spirit. There are many examples of human arrogance and stubbornness that have bedevilled and weakened both Pentecostal-charismatic and ecumenical initiatives and activities.

The distinction between basic inspiration-vision and later developments is important for all Christians to understand, but it has particular relevance for Evangelical Christians regarding their suspicion of ecumenism. Evangelical opposition to the ecumenical movement arose particularly in the 1960s in reaction to some politicizing tendencies, particularly within the World Council of Churches, and to some liberal demythologizing tendencies especially in the Protestant realm from the same period. It is then a mistake to equate ecumenism with particular ecumenical structures or agencies - though it is also necessary as Christians to recognize the positive elements as well as the negative. Ecumenism, or better the ecumenical movement, refers to the whole current of prayer, concern and action for the restoration of the unity of the whole Body of Christ.

*Growth in Mission and Evangelism.* While the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the rise of Protestant missionary work and societies, the 20<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed a massive spread of Christian faith beyond Europe and North America. But it is in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that more African, Asian and Latin American expressions of Christian faith are developing. In fact, in Africa, the slowness of this adaptation by the historic mission churches has contributed to the flourishing of new African churches, increasingly today of a Pentecostal or charismatic type. With the process of decolonization, indigenous leadership has replaced missionary control. Today, many observers of the world scene are noting a shift in the Christian world's centre of gravity from the northern hemisphere, at least its western part (Europe and North America) towards the south and east (Africa, Asia and Latin America). Parts of the Far East not in the southern hemisphere such as Korea and China are showing signs of extraordinary Christian growth. These developments reflect important dynamics of the Holy Spirit of God.

*The Return of the Jews to the Land of Israel.* I believe that the return of the Jewish people to the promised land of Israel is fundamentally a work of God. The return of the Jews is perhaps prophesied more than anything else in the Old Testament. It is also clear that these prophecies were not all fulfilled with that part of the Jewish community in Babylon that returned after the 70-year exile. This point is directly connected with the fidelity of the Lord to the promises given to Abraham. More will be said about this return in later chapters.

*The Second Vatican Council and the Renewal of the Catholic Church.* The Second Vatican Council, that gathered all the Catholic bishops of the world between 1962 and 1965, must be reckoned as a major work of the Holy Spirit in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Holding the Council came to Pope John XXIII as an inspiration from the Holy Spirit, so he entrusted the whole

work of the Council to the Holy Spirit in the prayer he wrote for the whole Church to use in the time of preparation: “Renew, O Holy Spirit, thy wonders in our day as at a new Pentecost”. Pope John made clear that this was to be a Council for the renewal of the Church, not for condemnations but for the fresh wind of the Spirit to blow through the Church.

The Second Vatican Council has changed the face of the Catholic Church in communion with Rome. Your great grandparents would be amazed to find a Church that looks and behaves in very different ways to the past. Yes it is the same Church with the same faith, the same Creeds, the same moral convictions; but look at what is different. The liturgy of the Roman Church can now be celebrated in all the languages of the world. There is an active participation of lay people in the liturgy, with lay readers, eucharistic ministers and much more singing. The Catholic Church now participates fully in the ecumenical movement. Leaders from many churches and denominations meet each other, know each other and work together. Dialogue has replaced confrontation. There has been repentance for the sins against unity in the past. Dialogue has also become the Church’s stance before Judaism, the major religions of the East, before modern culture and secularism. There is a Catholic emphasis on religious liberty and on the importance of freedom of conscience. None of these were true of the Church of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

However, the Second Vatican Council was not just a bolt from heaven. The Holy Spirit had been preparing the ground over the previous forty to eighty years. The way was prepared by various currents of renewal. Closely related to each other have been the liturgical renewal, stemming especially from 1908, and the biblical renewal, stimulated by an encyclical of Leo XIII on the Scriptures in 1893. The liturgical renewal had sought to restore the liturgy to the whole Church, so that the liturgy, especially the Eucharist, would become the living worship of the whole Church and truly nourish the faith of the people. This quest had stimulated liturgical studies leading to a greater understanding of the origins of the Church’s liturgy and its roots in Israel. Especially under Pius XII, some important liturgical reforms had been introduced, that anticipated the direction of the Council. The biblical renewal had sought first to stimulate Catholic biblical scholarship and secondly to encourage regular Bible reading and study among the Catholic faithful. Liturgical renewal and biblical renewal go together because of the role of the Bible in the liturgy, both in the use of biblical texts and in the range of biblical symbolism. The ecumenical way was prepared by various pioneers, whose ideas were not always appreciated by church authority. Also important was the rise of the lay apostolate, with the formation of lay movements such as the Legion of Mary, the Young Christian Workers, and of lay associations, such as the Newman Association or the Newman Society. The Council teaching on the call of all to holiness was prepared for in the “Little Way” of St Therese of Lisieux (1873 - 1897) to do all the small tasks of each day in union with Jesus and out of love for him.

*Martyrs.* The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the century of martyrs. During this time there have been more Christian martyrs than in all the previous centuries of church history combined. This bloodshed is continuing into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The higher rate of martyrdom is a consequence of greater Christian dynamism encountering greater opposition, whether from totalitarian regimes or from militant Islam. Here we can detect a pattern developing through the 20<sup>th</sup> century: an increase in the tempo of the Holy Spirit (new movements of the Spirit, increased mission and evangelization, Christian protests against injustice) and an increase in radical evil and in militant opposition to Christian faith. There appears before us a mounting crescendo - in both the holy and the unholy - that points to history moving towards a climax.

Questions for Discussion

1. What overall pattern can you see developing through the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>?
2. What do you see as the most significant developments in the sight of God? Why do you pick this example?