

'Church and World'

- *Movements and mission in the 19th century*

CHURCH IN REVOLUTION

Revolution in the Church

We have already noted how the new social structures brought about by the Industrial Revolution gave rise to radical changes within the church. It also saw the emergence of a plethora of new societies using many different labels such as, 'denominational', 'undenominational' and 'interdenominational'. There were also groups struggling with the expression of faith within the church structures of the day; they in turn gave rise to new forms of church life: -

Plymouth Brethren

Despite their name the movement began in Dublin with a medical student Edward Cronin. Wanting to return to the simplicity of Christian life and worship portrayed in apostolic times, he met informally in a private house, 'to break bread and to pray', with like minded individuals drawn from among Anglican and Nonconformist evangelicals. They were reacting against what they saw as the deadness, formalism and sectarianism of much of the church at the early part of their century. Among the early participants were Anthony Norris Groves and JN Darby. Their characteristic concerns were:

- A simple communion service emphasising the priesthood of all believers;
- An expectation of the imminent return of Jesus;
- A constant appeal to the scriptures;
- A renunciation of worldly possessions and status;
- A Calvinistic approach to doctrine;
- An enthusiasm towards evangelism.

Darby proved to be the strong teacher of the group, with a strong leaning towards prophetic studies. Groves was concerned by his dominance and his legalistic tendencies, which were the very thing they were trying to remove themselves from.

In 1831 BW Newton began a thriving congregation in Plymouth. However, in 1845 Derby clashed with Newton and a division occurred, the longer-term impact of which affected all the assemblies. From that time on Brethren became two distinct groups; the 'Open' holding to the original principles and the 'Exclusive' which became increasingly centralised and separatist.

In 1829 Groves with his wife and some friends sailed to Baghdad and later to India as a missionaries. From these small beginnings was to grow what was to become one of the largest Christian missionary networks 'Echoes of Service'. It was to sponsor as missionaries one in every hundred of the home congregations. Brethren have in fact always had an impact in the evangelical Christian world out of all proportion to their numbers.



Oxford Movement

While it begins in 1833, the Oxford Movement (so called because of the number of Oxford 'dons' in its original leadership), has its roots in the High Church attitudes of the Anglicans of the seventeenth century. As we have seen, the Anglican church was most strongly influenced by the evangelicals and High Church perspective was found much more in Ireland. When the government planned to reduce the number of Irish bishops many with a High Church persuasion felt they could not be silent. John Keble (1792-1866) an Oxford 'don' preached his famous 'Assize' sermon in 1833 challenging the action as an affront to the sovereignty of God. He stirred many, including some with evangelical backgrounds, who felt that evangelicals emphasis on personal conversion had dimmed the vision of the church as a living body with a link to the church of all ages through bishops, priests and deacons. They published their ideas in a series of 'Tracts for the Times'; this gave them the nickname 'Tractarians'. Because the members of the movement tended to be backward looking, very conservative and sacramental in their theology they were accused of going against the spirit of the Reformation despite their published denials. They believed, in fact, that the Anglican church was as close to the early church as it was now possible to get; there was no pope, but there was apostolic succession and authority.

From 1840 the Oxford Movement was led by John Henry Newman (1801-1890). He had an evangelical background but came to believe that the Anglican church was a middle way between Catholicism and Protestantism. He went on to try to show that the 'Thirty Nine Articles' of Anglicanism were in basic agreement with the decisions of the Council of Trent. His views provoked such a widespread outcry that he was driven to the conviction that real authority lay in the Church of Rome. The pressure led him, in 1845, to become a Catholic. The Oxford Movement was weakened at this time because some of its key leaders took a similar decision.

The Oxford Movement revived an important aspect of the Anglican devotion and spirituality. In the 1840's many churches had simply the dull recitation of the prayer book, while evangelical congregations added hymns from the dissenting traditions. By 1842 we see some of the Oxford Movement reviving an interest in mediaeval liturgy, beginning to bring colour and high quality music and a more sacramental life into the worship of many parish churches. This continues to have an important impact in many traditions within the Protestant world. Members of the Oxford Movement also did important pioneering work amongst the poor in the nations large urban slums.

Student movements

An important characteristic of church emphasis in the nineteenth century was its emphasis on students, both their needs in a changing world and their potential as leaders and missionaries in the next generation. This is seen in the rise of some significant organisations:

- **The YMCA:** There appear to have been a number of independent groups which emerged, mid century, in several European countries, with an evangelistic and pastoral concern for students. But it was the personality of George Williams [1821-1905], a convert of the evangelist Finney, who used to meet for Bible studies with young men; that gave rise to the London Young Men's Christian Association in 1844. This created a catalyst for similar groups, on an international scale, which became a single



organisation, the World Alliance of YMCA's, in 1878. Their 'Red Triangle' is now the global symbol of an organisation that today has over 6 million members. Its initial purpose was evangelistic, and to provide shelter and friendship to students who found themselves alone and isolated in large cities when travelling or carrying out their studies. The women's equivalent YWCA with its 'Blue Triangle' grew out of smaller groups to be incorporated in 1877.

- **Student Christian Movement:** The SCM grew out of several student movements, the Student Volunteer Missionary Union, in Cambridge University being particularly important. This came into being in 1892 through the 'Cambridge Seven' who went as missionaries to China in 1885. Subsequently, the SCM chose to move away from its evangelical origins to become 'interdenominational' rather than 'nondenominational', incorporating both liberal and High Church influences. Its members made important contributions to the ecumenical movement in the 1900's.
- **Student Volunteer Movement:** It was an American movement founded specifically to enlist Christian college students for foreign missions. It originated from a summer Bible study conference in 1886 presided over by DL Moody. The influence of Robert Wilder encouraged over 100 students to indicate their willingness to serve as missionaries before the conference closed. A tour of universities led to more response. In 1888 it was formally organised under the leadership of John R Mott, with the motto, "The evangelisation of the world in this generation". While it lost its momentum in the 1920's it nevertheless saw 20,000 young people become foreign missionaries.

Evangelical awakening

Throughout the nineteenth century there were considerable periods of revival that began in America, and then spread to Ireland, England and Scotland. In Britain alone over a million people were added to the church. Three key figures were:

- **CG Finney (1792-1875):** As a young man with limited formal education, Finney entered a law office in Adams, New York. He was later admitted to the bar. He began attending church services with a friend; initially critical of religious ideas he had a conversion experience in some woods near his home after reading the Bible for himself in 1821. Within a year he began preaching in the Presbyterian church, saying he had 'a retainer from the Lord to plead his cause'. For the next eight years he carried out revival meetings in the 'burnt over districts'¹ of the eastern states with amazing results; especially in Rochester in 1830-31. In 1832 he became a pastor, and during this time wrote his book, 'Lectures on Revivals of Religion'. In the book he argued that revival was not a miracle but the use of proper means; it was widely read and debated. In 1835 he became professor of theology at Oberlin, Ohio, but remained active in preaching. He developed 'perfectionist' teaching and was also involved in social issues, especially the abolition of slavery. He travelled to Britain twice in the 1850's. Finney is credited with seeing some 500,000 conversions during his ministry.
- **DL Moody (1837-1899):** Moody left home at 17, with little education, to become a shoe salesman in Boston. Brought to faith by his Sunday school teacher, he failed a test in

¹ The 'burnt over districts' were those parts of the eastern states which had been most greatly influenced by the revivals of the 'great awakening' in the eighteenth century.



Bible knowledge and was refused church membership. Moving to Chicago in 1856 he became a very successful in business as a travelling salesman. Every Sunday he would fill four church pews with 'outsiders' brought in from the street corners. By the age of 23 he had began his own Sunday School which he began to work for full time two years later. During the Civil War he worked among the soldiers and continued the Sunday School; which soon became a fully established church. Between 1873-1875 he toured Britain with Ira Sankey his song leader; initially unknown and beginning in the north of England they had small successes, this turned to strong response in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Finally, in 85 meetings over a four month period in London, 2.5 million people came to hear him! He returned to America a national figure. The rest of his life was spent preaching across the United States, as well as establishing schools, the 'Moody Bible Institute' and being involved in social work. It is estimated he travelled a total of one million miles and communicated the gospel to 100 million people.

- **CH Spurgeon** (1834-1892): Born in Kelvedon, Essex; both his father and grandfather were nonconformist ministers. Converted in 1850, he chose believers baptism to the disappointment of his parents. He began preaching in Cambridgeshire as a 17 year old, and within 18 months his reputation had reached London; he was invited to preach in New Park Street Chapel. He became pastor there as a 19 year old. Spurgeon had mediocre formal education, but was an avid student reading on average 6 books a week and building a library of 12,000 volumes. He began with a congregation of 232 but soon no building seemed large enough to hold all who wanted to hear him. In 1861 the Metropolitan Tabernacle was especially built to hold the 6,000 who were regularly coming to hear him. It is said that between 1861-91 some 14,460 people joined the congregation. Because of a period of economic and social distress a National day of Fast and Humiliation was held in 1854, Spurgeon spoke at the Crystal Palace to 24,000 people. His sermons were all printed and fill 63 volumes, these and his many other books make him the most widely read preacher in history. Calvinist by persuasion he had his share of controversy; challenging hyper-Calvinism, Arminianism, infant baptism and radical ideas among the Baptists which led him to resign from the Union. Called the 'prince of preachers' in his own lifetime; his clear voice, popular language, humour, grasp of scripture and love for God made a remarkable impact on his generation.

Secular challenge

The word 'Victorian' conjures up a picture of grim, humourless religious observance practiced by the majority of the population; but this is not the whole picture. On one hand it was a time of remarkable social action and response to the gospel, but it was also an age of doubt, spiritual discontent, and intellectual unease. The seeds of rationalism, skepticism was continuing to bear full fruit. Science, philosophy and history were all being used in an attempt to show that Christianity was false:

- **Science:**² The educated elite in the Victorian age were fascinated by developments in the study of geology which appeared to indicate that the earth was much older than previously thought. In itself this was not destructive for faith; many of the leading geologists were Anglican clergy, like William Paley, who believed that their work demonstrated the wonder of God in creation and illustrated the argument for the existence of God from design. In 1859, the young Charles Darwin, an admirer of

² This is developed in much more detail in the session on 'Science and Faith'



Paley's, published his 'Origin of the Species'. He not only argued for evolutionary development from simplest life forms to human beings, but also suggested that instead of divine providence an impersonal struggle lay behind the process. The ideas were brought into public debate by Aldous Huxley made a stand of 'humble agnosticism', and fuelled the controversy between 'science and scripture'.

- **Philosophy:** In Germany the debate was between reason and faith rather than science and scripture. Immanuel Kant argued that the mind could only reason from sense objects so to think philosophically about God must be flawed. He argued that if God is to play any part at all it could only be in the area of morals. Friedrich Schleiermacher was a theologian who agreed with Kant's objections to philosophical theology. He saw the essence of faith being in a person's 'religious experience' and their sense of absolute dependence upon God. In both cases we see God being reduced, individualised and made subjective.
- **History:** The ideas of the German philosopher Hegel influenced the thinking of Karl Marx; a German Jew born to Lutheran parents, who settled in London. In 1867 he drew a synthesis from German philosophy, French politics and English economics and wrote 'Das Kapital'; his grand indictment of the capitalist system. He divided his time between social agitation and researching evidence in the reading room of the British Museum. He believed that history was the product of the human struggle with the material world to meet their basic needs that would result in the emergence of a classless society. He believed that a revolution to this end would begin in Britain; a political programme already announced in 'The Communist Manifesto', which he wrote with supporter and patron Friedrich Engels in 1848. It would take the next century and another location for the full impact of his ideas to begin to be felt.³

MISSIONARY REVOLUTION

Church and the world

Before 1789 the geographical and cultural focus of the Christian church was, with few exceptions, the continent of Europe⁴. At that date there was no indication that Christianity would, in fact, soon become the most widespread religion on earth. Since 1500 the church had indeed projected itself outwards; especially through the work of the Catholics, and particularly that of the Jesuits. Nonetheless, it was limited. The continents of the New World saw the major impact through emigration and exploitation from Europe; the south becoming largely Catholic, and the north, Protestant. In all other areas sacrificial mission had essentially left limited results.

The reasons for the minimal impact of the church outside the Continent are to be found within Europe itself, they were:

- **Political:** religious and civil wars had left the nations divided;
- **Demographic:** the population had been reduced and enfeebled;
- **Economic:** the finances of the nations had been weakened;

³ The impact is discussed in the section on the 20th century 'Wind and Fire' below

⁴ This is developed more fully in the session 'Developments in Mission'



- **Theological:** most Christians saw the 'great commission' as applying only to the apostles; Calvinists believed that if there were 'elect' among the nations they would be saved sovereignly.

The Protestants in particular had so spent their energies in divisions and theological disputes they had little vision or interest in taking the gospel to the wider world. The attitude of the Protestant church to mission, in particular, is seen in the fact that: -

- The Anglicans formed the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1701; but only because they were appalled at the growth of Presbyterianism in the colonies, and stories about the vice among the settlers: essentially concerned with the English overseas;
- The explorer Captain James Cook believed that the peoples he was discovering would never hear the gospel because it would never be financially worthwhile.

Into all the world

The reasons for the remarkable global expansion of the church following 1789 are not simple to explain. Nevertheless, some of the main influencing factors were:

- **Economic:** the Industrial Revolution created a commercial interest to explore for raw materials and markets for the products of the factories;
- **Political:** the rise and fall of the European empires and their desire for expansion and the control of new territories;
- **Scientific:** the Europeans knew an outline map of the world similar to our own but little about the interiors of the great continents; curiosity inspired voyages of discovery with larger ships and improved navigation;
- **Logistic:** steam revolutionised the speed of travel by rail and boat; the opening of the Suez canal in 1869 dramatically reduced travel times to the orient;
- **Psychological:** merchants who had created trading 'bridgeheads' in many nations believed that the strength of European culture could replace the indigenous political and social powers;
- **Theological:** the growing recognition that the people of the world would not hear the gospel unless they were told and that the church had the responsibility to do so.

Few of these factors were Christian but they created the environment in which the missionary expansion took place. These factors changed the world, they also changed the church; for good in restoring a global vision and the challenge to proclaim the gospel to all peoples, negatively through the compromises that were often involved.

At the outset the majority Christian reaction to missionary endeavour was mixed and cool, but there were those who were to light a torch for a different attitude: -

- There was the indisputable and challenging example of the Moravians;
- By the 1790's Calvinistic Baptists, Arminian Methodists, Anglicans and small dissenting groups, all began to move with concern for 'the conversion of the heathen';
- Apart from the continuing example of the Catholics, for the first three decades the missionary movement was restricted to the evangelicals; after that missions became a concern for the church as a whole;



- The 'evangelical awakenings' gave rise to the emergence of Protestant missionary societies:
 - * Baptist Missionary Society (1792)
 - * London Missionary Society (1795)
 - * Church Missionary Society (1799)
 - * British and Foreign Bible Society (1804)

Mission and imperialism

Political and economic expansion on the part of European nations provided a major opening and perceived benefit for mission; but raises major questions about the relationship between the gospel and western culture and colonialism. But the political and economic forces operated out of self-interest; exploration led to settlement, which in turn led to trade, exploitation and finally rule. For missionaries to ally themselves with 'imperialism', as many did, inevitably compromised both themselves and their message. Christianity and western culture became seen as one and the same thing. Some peoples welcomed missionaries in the hope of getting the advantage of 'civilisation'; others felt themselves exploited by a 'gospel' imposed from without. There was, however, resistance to missionaries by some commercial groups who feared they had revolutionary sympathies (eg Baptists), or would interfere with their expansion and exploitation

The ruthless nature of imperialism is demonstrated in the way Africa was carved up by the European nations: Britain, Portugal, France, Germany and Belgium, until only Ethiopia was self ruling; and that only because she successfully repelled Italy's advances. The attempts of some missionaries to put right the evils brought upon Africa by both the slave trade and imperialism, led to the development of the missionary doctrine of the 'Three C's - Christianity, commerce and civilisation'. The plan was to let Africa develop with both the plough and the scriptures. The first attempts were near failure, but Christians kept trying and in time self supporting / trading Christian communities were developed.

Factors in mission

Many of the earliest missionaries can only be described as 'patriarchal' in their attitude towards their converts. They yielded to the 'colonial model' that the western person is 'wise and good'. The new churches were usually western in style down to the smallest detail, which the converts imitated because they thought it must be right. Only very rarely and very slowly did the indigenous church emerge. The problem of 'partnership' and 'equality' in church and mission was only slowly addressed.

The nineteenth century saw a change in the gender emphasis of mission. The earliest missionaries, especially Catholic and Orthodox were not only male but usually celibate. The earliest Protestant missionaries were usually married couples and by middle of the century the majority of missionaries were women.

For all that it is important to highlight some of the negative influences in nineteenth century mission, nevertheless the early days of pioneer missionary work was without question an age of spiritual giants. The breadth of expansion and the number of remarkable men and women makes any fair presentation of the story impossible.



EXAMPLES IN MISSION

Carey and India

William Carey (1761-1834) was the son of a Northamptonshire schoolmaster, and apprentice to a shoemaker. He became a dissenter and was baptised as a believer in 1783. In 1792 he published, "An inquiring into the obligation of Christians to use means for the conversion of the heathen" - in which he argued that the 'great commission' still applied. In the same year he preached his famous, 'Lengthen the cords' sermon; proclaiming his famous maxim, "Attempt great things for God, expect great things from God". The direct consequence was the founding of the Baptist Missionary Society in October 1792. This was the first foreign mission to come out of the evangelical revival. The next year William Carey, and his family, set off for India. He worked for three months a year as a foreman for an indigo factory; he then spent the rest of his time studying oriental languages at which he was a genius. In 1799, joined by two other Baptists, he settled in Serampore in Calcutta, working together for the next twenty-five years; known as the 'Serampore Trio'. They also established a theological college. By the end of his life Carey had translated the whole Bible into 6 different languages, and made partial translations in 24 others, as well as producing grammars and dictionaries in many of them; truly incredible achievement.

Not only has William Carey been given the title, 'the father of modern missions', but showed the missionary emphasis on translating the scriptures into the language of the peoples. At the end eighteenth century the Bible was translated in whole or in part in 70 languages. By the end of the nineteenth century the figure was 300.

Livingstone and Africa

David Livingstone (1813-1873) was born in Blantyre, on Scotland's industrial coast. He was born to poor parents, and he worked in a cotton mill from the age of ten years. He was self-taught in early life, but went on to study medicine in Glasgow and London; and also theology. He was never a very promising student. From 1841-1856 he served as missionary in South Africa with the London Missionary Society; but he soon moved into the uncharted territory of the interior. Between 1851-56 he walked across Africa from West to East; however, the missionary board was not convinced as to the 'spiritual' value of such journeys. He returned to Africa in 1858 to lead a government expedition to explore the Zambezi; he called it, 'God's Highway into the interior'. It ended promisingly in 1863. He then returned to Africa without European companions and continued his quests until his death. David Livingstone believed in the unity of all truth; both biblical and scientific. While some of his work was not directly 'missionary' in the opinion of the day, he saw everything that he did in the context of preaching the gospel, the relief of suffering, and the increase of knowledge. He gave the vision to much of the later missionary work.

Taylor and China

Hudson Taylor (1832-1905) was a Yorkshire man who went to China as a missionary in 1853. However, due to lack of support from his missionary society he soon went independent. Having done medical training, he founded the China Inland Mission; the first truly interdenominational missionary society, and the prototype of the 'faith' mission, which was to be so important in the nineteenth century. His policy was clear:



- To bring the gospel to every unevangelised province in China;
- To refuse public appeals for funds so as not to divert giving from other missions;
- To accept missionaries with no formal college training;
- To insist that missionaries identify with the nationals in every possible way; dress, food, language;
- To direct the mission from China, not London, while keeping the home end informed through writing and preaching.

It is hard to realise how radical Hudson Taylor's actions and attitudes were; they cut at the heart of the 'colonial' approach to mission and focused on the indigenous church, which was revolutionary at the time.

Reflections

As the nineteenth century European missionaries went abroad, they had no reason to expect a greater response to the gospel overseas than they did in Europe; but the reality soon became clear:

- The Christians in India, China and Japan began to play a significant part in the world church, but the most dramatic changes took place in Africa and the Pacific;
- The peoples of Hinduism and Buddhism did not easily respond to the gospel; for intellectual, moral, traditional, social and national reasons; rather they were able to absorb it into their own religious frameworks;
- The countries of Islam most strongly resisted the gospel. Robert Bruce an Irish missionary wrote from Iran, "I am not reaping the harvest, I can scarcely claim to be sowing the seed, I am hardly ploughing the soil, but I am gathering out the stones; but that too is missionary work";
- It was amongst the world's primal religions that the most significant growth in the world wide church appeared.

As the twentieth century dawns, as we shall see, the first 'World Missionary Conference' was held in Edinburgh in 1910; under the watchword, "the evangelisation of the world in this generation". The forward look of that conference endeavoured to build upon the successes of the nineteenth century. The frustrations and joys of that moment will become apparent.

Questions

1. What specific lessons does the nineteenth century have to teach us in the church of today?

Reading & Resources

DB Barrett (Ed) *'World Christian Encyclopedia'* Oxford 1982

M Broomhall *'Hudson Taylor'* CIM 1929

RJ Campbell *'Livingstone'* Ernest Benn 1880

O Chadwick *'The Victorian Church'* (2 Vols) SCM 1987

J Comby *'How to Read Church History'* (Vol 2) SCM 1989

T Dowley (Ed) *'Lion Handbook: The History of Christianity'* Lion 1977



M Drewery '**William Carey: A Biography**' Zondervan 1979
 G Faber '**Oxford Apostles: A Character Study of the Oxford Movement**' Faber 1974
 JF Findlay Jr '**Dwight L Moody: American Evangelist**' Ann Arbour Press 1969
 RH Glover & HJ Kane '**The Progress of World Wide Missions**' Harper 1960
 KJ Hardman '**Charles Grandison Finney: Revivalist and Reformer**' Syracuse Univ Press 1987
 KJ Heasman '**Evangelicals in Action**' Geoffrey Bles 1962
 T Lane '**Lion Concise Book: Christian Thought**' Lion 1986
 GH Lang '**Anthony Norris Groves: Saint & Pioneer**' London 1939
 KS Latourette '**A History of Christianity**' Harper 1953
 KS Latourette '**The Great Century**' (*History of the Expansion of Christianity Vol.4-6*) Zondervan 1970
 KS Latourette '**Christianity in a Revolutionary Age**' (5 Vols) Zondervan 1957-61
 S Neill '**A History of Christian Missions**' Pelican 1964
 E Norman '**The English Catholic Church in the Nineteenth Century**' Oxford 1984
 JE Orr '**The Light of the Nations**' Paternoster 1965
 CH Spurgeon '**Autobiography**' (2 Vols) Banner of Truth
 B Stanley '**The Bible and The Flag**' (*Mission and Imperialism*) Apollos 1990
 A Vidler '**A Century of Social Catholicism 1820-1920**' SPCK 1966
 A Vidler '**The Church in the Age of Revolution**' Penguin 1966
 Video '**Moody**' Quadras Films
 Video '**CH Spurgeon Tonight**' Gateway Films
 Video '**William Carey**' Gateway Films
 Video '**A Weaver's Son: William Carey**' Gateway Films