

## Chapter Four

### THE CHURCH IN TROUBLE

#### **The bad news**

For some 900 years now, the Church in the West has been growing weaker – since the time the religious influence of the monasteries peaked, that is, and Europe’s universities, a secularising influence, began to be established. By now, when there’s a (Christian) spiritual awakening across most of the world, Europe – home of the Western Church – has come to be ‘the unrevived continent.’

Conservative evangelical Church of England bishop, Wallace Benn, in his closing address to 2,000 leaders at the 2003 National Evangelical Anglican Congress, spoke of making mission a priority, and urged evangelicals to confront the challenge of a disbelieving society (Ruth Gledhill, T 24 Sept 03): “I know that in all the groupings of the Church we are growing most,” he said. “But overall, in the hugely secular state of our nation, we are not winning.” That’s the depressing reality: one can win relative to the rest of the Church, but winning in any absolute sense – seeing the transformation of society – still doesn’t happen.

Scotland is no longer a Christian country, the Pope had been reminding Scotland’s Catholic bishops in Rome six months previously. He told them they needed to launch a “new evangelisation” to draw people back to the Church. “We may observe that in Scotland, as in many lands evangelised centuries ago and steeped in Christianity, there no longer exists the reality of a Christian society.” Ambrose Griffiths, Catholic bishop of Hexham and Newcastle in the north east of England, told Catholics in his diocese (also in early 2003) that unless they shared their “faith story” the Church would fade away. “For too long we have looked after

ourselves, maintaining the status quo, and getting smaller in numbers as the stalwarts die and are not replaced by younger people. If we continue like this we shall eventually die out.”

As Archbishop-elect of Canterbury, George Carey – the last holder of that office – got himself into trouble for likening the Church of England to “an elderly lady sitting in her corner muttering ancient platitudes through toothless gums”<sup>1</sup>. He might have known better than to say as much: as T S Eliot observed in his *Four Quartets*, ‘human kind cannot bear very much reality’.

Best-selling American Christian author Philip Yancey has a gift for scratching where his readers itch. But the way he began *Soul Survivor*<sup>2</sup> didn’t please some of the pastors who read it. Subtitled ‘How My Faith Survived The Church’, the first chapter is headed: ‘Recovering From Church Abuse’. And the book begins:

Sometimes in a waiting room or on a plane I strike up conversations with strangers, during the course of which they learn that I write books on spiritual themes. Eyebrows are raised, barriers spring up, and often I hear yet another horror story about the church. My seatmates must expect me to defend the church, because they always act surprised when I respond, “Oh, it’s even worse than that. Let me tell you my story.” I have spent most of my life in recovery from the church ... Since my family lived in a mobile home on church property, I could never escape the enveloping cloud that blocked my vision and marked the borders of my world. Later, I came to realise that the church had mixed in lies with truth ...

Yancey speaks for many. Yet I don’t think most pastors are aware of the pain, disappointment, and frustration of countless thousands in relation to church life. Many people have simply walked away. Perhaps the most disturbing are the large number of active, committed believers who’ve become exceedingly reluctant to have anything more to do with the institutional Church. There are many prodigal sons and daughters, to be sure – and they bear their own

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<sup>1</sup> In an article for *Readers’ Digest*.

<sup>2</sup> 2001; London; Hodder & Stoughton; ISBN 0 340 78600 0.

responsibility for that. But not all who've 'left home' are by any means prodigals. Pastors tend to work on the assumption that church is relatively user-friendly. It isn't – not even for most pastors. I know: I've talked with lots of them. When my diocesan bishop and I were putting the world to rights on one occasion, and he was defending the Church of England's ways, I said to him: "It's alright for you: you were a convert into Anglicanism. I wasn't. I grew up as a vicar's kid. I don't have any illusions about it. I've seen this thing from the inside – and too often it stinks."<sup>3</sup> And he made me to know that he understood that. It's not just the disaffected who think the Church is in a far from healthy state: many of those, like me, who love the Church, feel the same way.

The greatest anger I've come across is shown by those who grew up Catholics. I'm talking about deep-rooted, seething anger. Some still go to church. Most don't. But they still see themselves as Catholics. At the other end of the theological spectrum, the new, charismatic churches – often with a hierarchical and 'shepherding' understanding of authority – have tended to produce a high number of pastoral casualties<sup>4</sup>.

In *O Brave New Church*, Anglican church leader and theologian Mark Stibbe gives a reason for the failure of the Church not usually mentioned: 'One of the most obvious reasons why the Church has not made a noticeable impact on an addictive society is that the Church itself shows evidence of addiction ... Many leaders and their congregations suffer from ingestive, process, people, ideological and technological addictions. Many clergy, in particular, suffer from work addiction.'<sup>5</sup> In other words, the Church is sick like society is sick.

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<sup>3</sup> The Church of England was noticeably improving even then, and has changed a lot for the better subsequently. That said, I'm still hearing horror stories ...

<sup>4</sup> Since they've inserted a basically traditional Catholic (i.e. Roman – implying controlling and hierarchical) understanding of authority into evangelical Christianity, perhaps that's not surprising. In a 'shepherding' understanding, my 'pastor' is a human being, rather than the Good Shepherd, Christ, himself. This has been attacked – not unjustly – as the usurping of divine authority.

<sup>5</sup> p 92.

The electronic Christian news service Joel News, in its 07 May 2004 edition, ran an article 'TREND: Number of unchurched adults in America doubled' (JN475-4):

Since 1991, the adult population of the United States has grown by 15%. During that same period the number of adults who do not attend church has nearly doubled, rising from 39 million to 75 million, a 92% increase. These startling statistics come from the most recent tracking study of religious behaviour conducted by The Barna Group, a company that follows trends related to faith, culture and leadership in America.

The study shows that the church has difficulty to connect with four social groups: men, young people, singles and urban people. One of the more surprising outcomes is that while about half of the church population has accepted Jesus as their savior, one out of every six unchurched adults (17%) has done so as well. If this last group was connected to a church, the resulting increase would be nearly 13 million new people – more than have joined the nation's churches in the past decade combined.

Barna noted that, to unchurched people, embracing church life is "both counter-cultural and counter-intuitive". Reaching out to unchurched people is difficult for born-again Christians because the two groups have such different viewpoints and lifestyles. Addressing the reticence of the unchurched takes more than prayer and hard work: it requires a lot of deep reflection to see the world and the local church from a completely different angle.

Barna noted that the millions of young unchurched have no understanding of or interest in church, even if it is "contemporary" in style. "Millions of young adults are more interested in truth, authenticity, experiences, relationships and spirituality than they are in laws, traditions, events, disciplines, institutions and religion. It will take radically new settings and experiences to effectively introduce unchurched individuals to biblical principles and practices."

**... and the better news**

Even down the years of decline, steady good work has been going on in the Christian community, much of it as un-newsworthy as it's been invaluable. For many individuals lasting Christian foundations have been laid. And the future life of the Church has been prepared for, even in the midst of demoralisation and collapse. Wherever there's faithful Christian discipleship and ministry, the evidence has shown, fruitfulness will result. The church scene isn't always and everywhere depressing.

You may well have a similar kind of indebtedness to church as me. I was raised by Christian parents in a churchgoing home. Church was part of family life. At church I went to children's Sunday School, and later sang in the choir. At school, teachers who were churchgoers often conducted religious education (RE) lessons in a most helpful way. I remember one of my Sunday School teachers, Mrs Justice, inviting me and my younger sister to her home to watch a series on TV during Lent called *Jesus of Nazareth* – few families having a set then. It had a profound impact on me (and I still have the book that accompanied the series). At one school I attended, the whole school was shown a film on the trial and crucifixion of Christ, just before Easter. I couldn't stop myself weeping. Much later in life, I discovered that the headmaster and his wife – whom I didn't happen to like much – were committed Christians. At my next school, RE was taught by a friendly Baptist minister. Towards the end of the school year, he suggested to the class that we might like to go to nearby Manchester to listen to a preacher called Billy Graham. I signed up – and, at the end of the event, went forward. That wasn't when my life changed, but I knew then, as I know now, that it was a very significant time for me. Two schools later – I went to lots of them! – I was in the choir (as a treble still), singing such anthems as 'Lead me Lord, lead me in Thy righteousness, make Thy way plain before my face'. You don't sing lovely, spiritual, church music like that regularly without its making an impact on you. But when I was confirmed, around that time, by a bishop whose obituary would make it clear he'd been a senior Freemason, I was desperately disappointed. Like several of my friends, I'd expected 'something' to happen. Looking back, I think

I'd hoped to 'receive the Holy Spirit' – in a tangible way. Well, it wasn't to be (not then, anyway) – and I'm probably one of the few 'confirmed' in my batch who's still in the church orbit. That said, despite the disappointment, it was good to be able to receive Holy Communion – and, with this, to gain a sense of engaging with God at a new level. There was real meaning in what was happening to me in my religious life, I knew. I just couldn't figure out what it was – and no one was telling me.

In due course, it did all 'happen' for me – not least because of several Christian friends who sought to help me, and the biblical teaching and preaching at church services one of them invited me along to. Some years later I trained for full-time Christian ministry. Not all of us are called to go full-time as Christian leaders, but the Church depends for its well-being and growth on a reasonable proportion of those who've grown up within it emerging into at least part-time leadership.

Enough of my personal story, though. I only tell it because I know it intimately, and because it's not untypical of what goes on in the lives of many who grow up within the healthier part of the Church. My concern, however, is for those many who grew up within the life of the Church – in whatever stream or denomination – but for whom what was meant to happen never has happened. How many of them, I wonder, were meant to be leaders, teachers and facilitators in the Lord's work? Were any of them meant to be less than believers and disciples? Confirmation, in the Church of England, is designed to be almost an ordination into adult Christian life and ministry. What it was, though, for so many from the 1950s until recently, was the end of active participation in church life – because church was for children (and a few women who were into that sort of thing). There was almost a conspiracy of silence about this. As for me, though, I'm one of the profoundly grateful: without the multi-faceted life of the Church I almost certainly wouldn't be a believer today.

I want to honour men like my father who staffed the Church during the difficult period from just after World War 2 until the 1980s. Speaking at the funeral of my father-in-law's father-in-law (think about it!) – another Church of England clergyman – I observed that men like him and my father (neither of them evangelicals, as such) had, as well as achieving many self-evidently positive things, overseen an orderly retreat by the Church. Achieving any orderly retreat takes skill and commitment. In ordinary, as well as in military life, giving up ground in such a way can be exceedingly valuable. What the work of these faithful pastors in difficult circumstances left, when my generation took over, was a viable platform on which we could build; not chaos. (There were, of course, many church leaders who 'sold the pass', or simply failed, leaving little that could be rescued after them. But they haven't determined the Church's future).

There is another man I want to honour: the late Fr Halpenny, who served a Roman Catholic parish on the west side of Doncaster that coincided with the Anglican one I served. He was always a friend and mentor to me. He explained to me why an old man like him was still in harness: "You see, David, there are hardly any young priests coming out of seminary these days, so there's no one to replace me." We used to meet, mostly, in the hospital when doing our visiting. He was a little man, always dressed in black (of course), and carried a little case. No matter what the hour, he always seemed to be on duty. And he did it for the Lord – he didn't tell me that, I just knew. I don't think he realised it, but he proved a very powerful model for me, even though the two of us operated out of rather different theories of ministry.

One problem with being an evangelical, or evangelical charismatic, is that one's constituency functions as though it were the only true part of the Church (not that other groupings are exempt from this failing). This is rarely, if never, said – but it tends to be the instinctive view; and one either absorbs or rejects it. The fact is, we're justified by faith if we're justified at all, and not all who have faith in Christ are evangelicals or even Protestants. There are individuals, congregations, and

Christian communities dotted around who simply see themselves as part of the historic Christian Church, and who form streams of faithful Christian life down into the future. Across Europe they are Orthodox and Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran, and so on.

Growth in the Church in the West – as Wallace Benn pointed out – is largely evangelical, whether of the traditional or charismatic/Pentecostal kind. It is, of course, growth within overall decline. This is changing the character of both the Western Church generally, and its historic parts. For instance, in England, the proportion of those being ordained by the Church of England who are broadly evangelical has been something like 60%, compared to around 10% after World War 2. That's not only a dramatic change for the state church, it alters the whole church scene in the nation.

Also changing the Church in nations like Greece and England, and helping it grow, is immigration. I was amazed to discover how many non-European Christians and congregations there were in Athens on my first visit a while back – such that they were in a position to change the overall character of the Church in that city. Not a few of these Christians were 'illegals', who'd stayed on after their permits had expired and then been won to Christ. Technically they shouldn't have been in Greece still – but the nation needs them to be there, if it's to be won for the living gospel again. In London, the Church has been strengthened immeasurably by the arrival of a whole spectrum of non-European believers and the congregations they form. Their presence not only profoundly benefits the city, it influences for good the whole life of the nation.

Not all the non-Europeans who come to bless us in Britain intend to settle here. There are Argentinians and Brazilians, Ghanaians, Nigerians and Ugandans – among many others – who travel here for ministry trips or short-term stays, to help the Church here find the way back to strong life and healthy growth. Whereas Europeans took the gospel to their nations in the first place, now they're

coming back with it – as our spiritual grandchildren, they say, in gratitude – so that we can share in the good things the Lord has been teaching and imparting to them.

A very positive development in recent decades – it may be the only thing of substance the ecumenical movement has ever achieved – is that a large proportion of church members have come to see themselves as, first, Christian and then, only secondarily, as whatever ‘brand’ they are. This is true even of Catholics, despite the official, quite hard-line, teaching of the Roman Church. From this new reality we may just be able to fashion some sort of concept of church – in the sense of global Christian community, or ‘the (one) Body of Christ’ – which both means something today and is consistent with what the Bible has to say on the matter.

### **Some key problems that need addressing**

The Church’s self-image as communicated to its membership and – beyond – to the world, ranges from “we’re doing okay” to “we’re the answer to the world’s problems”. A friend, not so long ago, shared with the congregation she belongs to a word she believed the Lord had given her: that it was time for ‘a reality check’. It’s a word for most of the Church, I reckon, not just the bit she belongs to.

Part of the prophetic message for the Church today is that we need a ‘second Reformation’. Bill Beckham’s book *The Second Reformation*, arguing the need for a move to cell-church philosophy and structures, asks: ‘Why is the Church so ineffective at confronting the desperate needs of our society?’ And at the head of his first chapter he quotes Albert Einstein: ‘The thinking which created the problems we have today is insufficient to solve them.’<sup>6</sup> The concept of another

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<sup>6</sup> William A. Beckham, *The Second Reformation: Reshaping the Church for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 1995; Houston; TOUCH Publications; ISBN 1-880828-90-1.

Reformation, though, needs to be broadened out from what Beckham envisaged when he wrote his book: his first-principles approach can be even more fruitful than he himself envisaged at that stage. All that we can identify which was hardly addressed at all, or dealt with insufficiently, in the original Reformation needs to become agenda for us now – joined to an appropriate radicalism. A fundamental shift in our whole concept of Christianity and Church, to bring it into line with biblical principles and values, must be involved. Mentioning some key negatives in contemporary Christianity will serve as a reminder of what most of us already know has to change. This is the list that immediately springs to mind for me – the one you'd come up with might be somewhat different:

- **LORDSHIP** The Lord isn't being allowed to run his own show. Jesus said of the Church that it was *his* Church and that *he himself* would build it (Matt 16:18). Through the Holy Spirit he expects to have immediate executive governing authority amongst us – but he's only very rarely allowed it. Church leaders, it seems, can't cope with the loss of (human) control this involves – if indeed they're able to discern what God is up to (what he's saying and doing) in the first place. When John Wimber asked the Lord what message he was to bring when he visited England in 1984, this was the answer he got: "John, tell them I want my Church back." And I remember people's response: "Yes, we must do this!" They meant it; but for reasons I'm beginning to understand, it never happened. It's quite a challenge for most of us to see what the Lord is doing, and to hear his voice clearly – so we tend to make do with a very human substitute for that (our guess as to what he might be doing and saying). Beyond that, it's scary letting the Lord run his own show – like the loss of a sense of being in control when one parachutes from an aircraft for the first time. But for the Lord not to be ceded immediate control of his own Church is a serious matter.
- **INSECURITY** The insecurity of pastors is a phenomenon that needs researching. I no longer believe, as I used to, that it's mostly insecure

people who become pastors. Rather, I've started to think that something like the following happens: a mixture of secure and insecure individuals, who become pastors, are transitioned into a place of insecurity – or greater insecurity – as they enter into leadership positions. Why? Because the life of the Kingdom is lived by faith – and most of us as 'ordinary' Christians have never been put into the position of needing to put our trust in Christ at any radical level. So what happens when we move into Christian leadership is either that the new situation finds us out, in some obvious way, or we quickly develop coping mechanisms to allow us to evade the challenge of living by faith. (I know, I've done it myself). But, besides, if pastors are operating with several wrong paradigms simultaneously – as seems often the case – they end up occupying some very difficult territory from a leadership point of view. (Consider a comparable state of affairs in the Western industrial world: the management of an engineering industry which has neither grasped the degree of competitive advantage enjoyed by the burgeoning Chinese economy, nor foreseen the medium- and long-term impact of sharply raised raw materials prices generated by China's rapidly increasing demand for them; such managers don't understand the precariousness of their industry's current position. Then imagine them trying to persuade their shareholders or bankers to invest more money in the business ... ).

- **CONTROL** As inheritors of the Roman Empire and its DNA and spirit, we Westerners are all affected by the Roman instinct to control. Human control isn't always unhealthy, of course, even in the Church. But, beyond what's absolutely needed, it's unhealthy. And when it's exercised because of leaders' need to control, it does serious – if hidden – damage both to them and to those they control. Control, and the manipulation that usually goes with it, are too common in church life. The government of people's lives belongs properly to Christ, as Good Shepherd: they're meant to be listening to *his* voice and doing what *he* says (which is very often rather different from what their pastor says – or wants to say – and would have

- them do). Church leaders, as under-shepherds, have the commission simply to assist Christ in his work of pastoral leadership and government.
- **UNBELIEF** When John Wimber visited England at the end of the 1980s, he pointed out to us that, if the unfortunate American tendency to exaggerate went with an attitude of faith, the rather attractive English habit of understatement went with unbelief. It isn't just England that has this problem. It's affecting large segments of American life currently, too. But we in the rest of the West are the ones most radically undermined by it. I say 'undermined' because if the Christian life is lived 'by faith', unbelief destroys it at the foundations. I understand an active spiritual force of unbelief to be operating, which governs our culture and permeates the life of the Church: unbelief isn't just absence of faith.
  - **THE BIBLE** One of the primary ways unbelief works is to deny the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture – even in the lives of those Christians who understand themselves to be Bible-based evangelicals. In England, for instance, there are few evangelicals who'd make up their mind about the validity or otherwise of either capital punishment or corporal punishment on the basis of what the Bible has to say on these matters (it could be in favour); in the United States, few of them who would do likewise with respect to democracy or capitalism (it could be against). Again, if hell and judgement are believed in by evangelicals at a formal level, these realities don't seem to capture the evangelical imagination any more, or influence the way we live our lives much<sup>7</sup>. Nor is the Bible taught and preached by evangelicals as it used to be. The majority of us seem to have moved beyond that 'primitive stage'. If this can be the case with evangelicals, in the more liberal parts of the Church the Bible is far less influential. Ironically – given their history – it's the Catholics who are often the ones moving towards the Bible rather than away from it. But the Catholic hierarchy has been at pains of late to emphasise that Catholics

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<sup>7</sup> It's where what Scripture says is at variance with what my culture and worldview say that I discover how much authority and relevance it really has in my life.

are not ‘the people of the book’. In the accounts of Jesus’ temptations, he prefaces his quoting of the Old Testament at Satan with “It has been written / It stands written” – as though no more needed to be said: “That’s what the Bible says, Satan ... end of argument.”<sup>8</sup> If the Old Testament is authoritatively God’s word to us in this way, the New Testament is meant to have even more authority for us. But one wouldn’t guess that from a lot of Western church life. As for the Old Testament, it’s increasingly ignored by large sections of the Church; and the New commonly employed on a pick-and-choose basis.

- **GOSPEL FOR THE POOR** If the gospel is for the poor and underprivileged above all, why is the Church in the West so irremediably middle-class? It was Karl Marx’s friend and sponsor, Friedrich Engels, who observed in the 1800s of the working classes that “the Church never had them”. ‘Ordinary people’ listened to Jesus enthusiastically, we read – but they seem to have little desire to listen to today’s Church, and even less to become involved in its life.
- **JESUS AND HIS GOSPEL OF GRACE** In the mid-1990s, Philip Yancey produced two Christian best-sellers: *The Jesus I Never Knew*<sup>9</sup>, and *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*<sup>10</sup>. Yancey never knew the real Jesus, he implies, because the real one is very different from the one he learnt about in church. He’s not the only one who was offered a religious substitute for the historical Jesus of Nazareth. And ‘the amazing thing about grace’, apart from grace’s inherent amazingness, is this: if the gospel is all about grace, how did the Church – entrusted with the true gospel – manage to convey all sorts of do’s and don’t’s, but not the extravagant, undeserved kindness our Heavenly Father offers us? Making rules for people to keep, and expecting them to behave to the highest standards, seems to occupy the most fundamental place in the Church’s

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<sup>8</sup> His teaching reveals clearly enough, though, that he understood the need for Scripture to be interpreted appropriately, where its meaning wasn’t self-evident.

<sup>9</sup> 1995; Grand Rapids; Zondervan; ISBN 0-310-38570-9.

<sup>10</sup> 1997; Grand Rapids; Zondervan; ISBN 0-310-24565-6.

DNA overall – such that the good news we, in our better moments, want to share rarely gets heard. You might think that the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury, at Christmas or Easter, might want to say something to the world about the wonder of who Jesus is and what he did. Not a bit of it! They and other ecclesiastical dignitaries across the world usually treat these festivals as an opportunity to chide the world for its ungodliness; and to say they expect better! St Paul, like Jesus, would have known to do otherwise: e.g. 1 Cor 5:12; John 4: 7-30<sup>11</sup>.

- **LOVE** Those of us who have come to personal faith usually have a story to tell of the love and friendship of a variety of individuals, which made all the difference for us. We Christians aren't consistently loving – but there's a tremendous amount of love at the informal level in the Church. When we form groups, however, and organise ourselves, love can – and does – easily absent itself. There are many reasons for this, but two seem to me to predominate. One is that our structures are affected by both (inappropriate) Old Testament and (even more inappropriate) Roman Empire influences and models; the other that, as we increase in group size, religion (which is impersonal) tends to displace relationship (which is highly personal). If, without love, we are utterly separated from God's purposes (1 Cor 13:2), Christians should be concerned about this. In its institutional form, right across the theological spectrum, the Church can be quite disturbingly unloving (of which more later).
- **RELIGION, SUPER-SPIRITUALITY, AND THE SACRAMENTAL** By the end of World War 2, what most of the Western Church still offered was religion rather than relationship with God. The rise of evangelicalism and charismatic spirituality has markedly improved this situation. But there's still a major difficulty amongst evangelicals in relation to the concept of what's 'spiritual'. This is because, for so long, there's been a serious imbalance between a strong emphasis on the saving gospel and only a

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<sup>11</sup> Since writing this, the two Archbishops of the Church of England showed on Easter Day, 2006, that they could both make a substantial, and newsworthy, gospel impact. Perhaps something has changed ...

weak one on creation issues. So what's been thought of as 'spiritual' has effectively been separated from the gritty reality of the physical world. This has been disastrous. For example, Christians have rarely been able to see their work or leisure pursuits, their use of money, or their sex lives, in spiritual terms. But life, as God understands it, is holistic, 'sacramental'<sup>12</sup> (to use a Catholic term). The saving gospel itself has suffered from this distortion – because although, as e.g. Rom 8:19-21 reminds us, the state of the universe and the rescue of fallen humanity are intimately related, too much of the Church functions as though that's not the case.

- **LIVING IN A SPIRITUAL WORLD** Over the years since coming to personal faith I've been undergoing my own 'Copernican revolution' (Copernicus being the one who explained that the world revolved around the sun, not the sun around the world). This has involved coming to understand that physics isn't the basic reality behind everything, spiritual forces are: in other words, that what they taught me at school, then for my engineering degree, and, later, in my undergraduate theology studies, seriously misrepresents the truth. An increasing number of people in the West – the majority of them non-Christians – are going through a similar transformation in their understanding. But much of the Christian world still inhabits a *Modern* paradigm, where science explains the world for us. A surprising – and disconcerting – proportion of the Pentecostal and charismatic streams in Western Christianity seem quite hostile to explanations of reality which involve recognising that we live in a world full of spirits (spiritual beings) – spirits that have intelligences and wills, real power, and considerable (if not decisive) ability to influence what goes on around us. The Church should never have surrendered to a secular understanding of reality in the first place, but developed its own alternative version instead; it didn't. Gratefully, outside the West the Church hasn't been much influenced by secular education. So Christian leaders from non-Western nations can help us to see the spiritual realm that human

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<sup>12</sup> In a sacramental understanding, the physical is infused by the spiritual.

beings always can see unless it's educated out of them. Billy Graham, from within the West, wrote in the Preface of his book *Angels: God's Secret Agents*: 'When I decided to preach a sermon on angels ... I soon discovered that little had been written on the subject in this century. This seemed a strange and ominous omission.'<sup>13</sup> He begins Chapter 2 of his book: 'I have never heard anyone preach a sermon on angels.' A major topic in Scripture simply ignored. Why? Because the Church of his generation, not operating out of a biblical worldview, didn't know what to say – or do – about the world of spirits presented to it by the Bible. The current situation is that most church leaders aren't the experts on spiritual matters they ought to be – and that, where there is the relevant expertise in the Christian West, it's usually possessed by people not in formal church leadership (or non-Christians). But this kind of understanding is basic to life. If I were to ask English pastors about the current spiritual impact on national life of either, (a) our national symbol, Britannia – to which we as a nation sing in exhortation, "Rule, Britannia ..." – with its seeming relationship to the Greek deities Athena and Poseidon (Neptune), or (b) the worshipping of our rivers as goddesses<sup>14</sup> by the ancient Celts, few would likely be able to provide helpful insight. Not good!

- **SEXUAL PURITY** Recently there have been various discreet surveys in Britain of how the easy access to pornography in magazines and on the internet has impacted pastors (mostly male, I assume) and other Christian men. The evidence suggests that many have been not only enticed by it, but caught up into making habitual use of it, to the point of addiction. It seems that evangelicals, as well as others, have been significantly affected. Given the typically hard line taken in evangelical teaching on sexual behaviour, this is noteworthy. It's the prevalence of this behaviour amongst pastors that's particularly disturbing. If as many of them are

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<sup>13</sup> 1975/6; Sevenoaks; Hodder; ISBN 0 340 21670 0.

<sup>14</sup> I.e. worship of the water spirits associated with the rivers.

entrapped by pornography as appears<sup>15</sup>, what kind of impact is this having on the Christian community? In the Catholic Church in the West, sexual misbehaviour on the part of priests in recent decades – often resulting in the abuse of children and young people – has been shocking in its extent. What the medium-term impact of this will turn out to be for either the Catholics or the wider Western Church it's too early yet to tell – but it can only have been seriously damaging.

- **RESOURCE STARVATION** Sometimes the Lord's work benefits from scarcity of resources. But that's exceptional. Much Christian work today suffers from insufficient money and a lack of suitable people. I often ponder when looking at old cathedrals, or the remains of monasteries, just what (high) proportion of the resources available to the community at that time was employed in their construction. Apart from palaces and castles, there was nothing to compare with them when they were built. In those days the expenditure on church and monastery life was comparable to the defence budget – and possibly greater! Such is the contrast between the age of faith and an age of unbelief ...
- **CULTURAL CAPTIVITY** Rare have been the times when the Church hasn't been ensnared by the surrounding culture. Materialism is a major factor weakening the Christian community today; if not quite to the extent that it's captured the rest of the world. Fair play and political correctness powerfully serve to neutralise the rather more counter-cultural ideas revealed truth would have us adopt. In an age which has become radically sexualised, an increasing proportion of the Church is majoring on a spirituality of intimacy. Nothing wrong with that – except that the pastoral agenda can come to be driven by our culture's preoccupations, and too little by the Kingdom's. (If as much was heard in the Church about taking up one's cross and following Christ as about intimacy with God – not commonly enough the case – then a healthy balance would have been

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<sup>15</sup> Prayer leader David Bryant in the April 2005 *Intercessors For America* newsletter, on the basis of research by George Barna and others, says 'that 40% of our pastors [in the USA] admit to struggling with pornography'.

struck). In a previous generation, the idea of our needing to become 'Christian soldiers' (as in 'Onward Christian soldiers ...') – more than justifiable in itself – reflected a rather different emphasis, with its own associated difficulties, associated with the imperial spirit of that bygone age. There seems to have been no balancing truth that was commonly placed alongside that – often misunderstood – spiritual warfare teaching; sacrificial love, especially of one's enemies, say.

- **PERSONAL EVANGELISM** No one, in the normal course of church life, ever taught me how to lead someone to Christ, not even when I trained for the ministry. (Hopefully things have improved, at least in our seminaries). Even when, later, I came across training materials that were meant to help one do so, I found them mostly misleading and unhelpful. John Henry Newman – in *A Grammar of Assent*, I think – pointed out that the reasons we give others as to why we believe are almost always not the true ones (i.e. we're fooling ourselves – and so mislead others). Only recently has research-based teaching started to appear which does justice to the long and tortuous paths by which many of us come to faith. But there are basic principles that can be taught – for instance, the vital role that friendship usually plays; how the (counter-cultural) mention of the name and person of Jesus has powerful spiritual impact; and how understanding the world we live in, and the good apologetics that can grow out of that, really help clear away barriers for people. Only if every Christian in the West is schooled in sensitively reaching others for Christ can the Church really move into growth mode. Church-planting – 'the best method (of church growth) under heaven' – will only ever work properly if all involved are competent personal evangelists. The American Willow Creek Church ('church for the unchurched') explicitly recognises that not all Christians will be able to take those they're reaching all the way to conversion, and has set itself up to deal with this, saying, in effect: you start the process off, then bring them to us and we'll help complete the job. But all Christians need to be confident and competent starters of the process, at

least – and that’s far from being the case at present. All too often, in Christian circles where personal evangelism has been majored on, much of it has been profoundly insensitive – putting off many potential believers from the idea of conversion for the rest of their lives.

- **SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY** John Wimber used to recount the occasion when a woman attending a conference where he was a speaker wanted to give him a ‘word’ she had for him. Initially he resisted the idea, but ultimately relented. What she had to say was brief: “The Lord says, ‘Use your authority.’” “What’s that supposed to mean, lady?” he protested. “Don’t ask me,” she said, “I only get these words. I don’t understand them.” And he would tell how the concept of ‘authority’ meant precisely nothing to him as a pastor at that point. Not surprising, one might think, in someone who’d been inducted into the Quaker evangelical variant of Christianity. But this failure to get to grips with the concept, and reality, of spiritual authority seems to be the rule rather than the exception. It relates in some indirect way, I’m sure, to the crisis of authority in both society and Church in the West. Over the centuries, the abuse of both political and ecclesiastical power has meant that they’ve been drastically curtailed by those dominated by them, as and when opportunity has permitted that. In the political realm, this has involved the ‘ordinary’ people taking sovereignty to themselves in democratic systems of government. In the Church it’s led to a variety of things including congregational-type government – the people have power over their pastor – and supermarket-philosophy church: If I don’t like it here, I’ll just go somewhere else where the product range is more to my liking (such that leaders have to please the ‘customers’).
- **POWERLESSNESS** A Church which talks comparatively frequently about being salt and light seems to exercise precious little influence on contemporary society currently. And that part of it which reckons to expect healings and miracles to happen rarely sees any. In contrast to this, the Church in Uganda, for example, has made a considerable impact on the

nation in which it's set. And in many parts of the 'developing world', where the Church is still young, Uganda included, signs and wonders happen with a frequency which we in the Church in the West find it difficult to credit.

- **ECCLESIOLOGY** One would expect that, if the Church were expert in anything, it would develop a thoroughgoing understanding of itself, express that in a clear theology (ecclesiology), and teach it to those its disciples. This is indeed the case with the Catholic Church – although their ecclesiology is highly controversial from a Protestant viewpoint. But it amazes me how little the Church of England, for example, as a historic denomination – in which I grew up – and evangelicals, as a modern grouping – with which I identify – teach in any systematic way about the nature of the Church. It's very hard to come by books worth reading on the subject. There's a need to have expounded both what the Kingdom of God is, and how the Church – not the same thing – is related to it. If that happened, the Church might come to recognise the Kingdom – not itself – as its primary agenda; which ought to be the case, and so rarely is. It might also notice that the New Testament knows nothing of a 'priest' or 'pastor', or of a 'congregation' that that individual might lead. (The terms might be there in Scripture – but not with the modern meanings we attach to them). And it might take the idea of the visible unity of the Church as the one Body of Christ with real seriousness – and take the costly practical steps necessary to achieve this (to the maximum extent consistent with wisdom and the maintaining of what are regarded as key truths).
- **DOGMA, QUESTIONS, DEBATE, AND CRITICISM** It's been the Church's way for a very long time to have its leaders present their congregations – and the world beyond – with supposed certainties. "I talk – you listen. Okay?" The term 'pontificating' refers to what the Pope is reckoned to do – or, at least, was reckoned to do in the past: telling others what they ought to be thinking. 'Six feet [2 metres] above contradiction' – referring to the pulpit – is probably the Protestant equivalent. You aren't

meant to answer back. You aren't meant to say what you think yourself. You aren't even meant to ask questions designed to elicit an answer that really might clarify the point that's supposed to be being made (but unsuccessfully) – and certainly not penetrating questions that make the speaker / teacher distinctly uncomfortable (because beyond that person's capacity to produce a remotely-credible answer). With the possible exception of when Christians meet in small groups, debate about truth issues really isn't encouraged – and in most of the Church, most of the time, actively discouraged. And as for criticism ... What's done by sports teams after matches, or the military when training or after exercises, or politicians as they go about their daily business, isn't on in the Church. Good Christians, apparently, are approving, affirming Christians. This isn't remotely as helpful as it's supposed to be. There is, of course, a core of truth (dogma) that needs to be asserted, without negotiation. Because of trustworthy revelation, the Church has possession of real truth – but only an amount of it, limited to what's actually necessary. And even this needs to be discussed, debated, argued over, if it's to be grasped adequately – as all serious study of theology shows clearly enough. There's a humbling truth that the Church has yet to face up to: 'Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror ...' (1 Cor 13:12). The basic fact is that none of us understands very much – and a culture needs to be developed that acts as though that's the way it is, even for church leaders. True preaching certainly doesn't need to go – but inappropriate dogmatism does: it damages us all.

- **INEFFICIENCY** In the parable of 'the talents', our gifts, we're told, are to be put to work – productively – for the Lord's service. Using our giftedness, we soon discover, isn't just a private matter. For Christians, the Church – as community – has a significant role to play in helping us discharge this responsibility. But because of the way most of the Church is structured, only exceptionally does it expect either to train up its people to a level consistent with the full extent of their giftedness, or to facilitate their

use of their gifts for the Lord's service. No business would prosper on this basis. The extent of unexploited assets in the Church – gifts that Christians simply don't know how to deploy properly for the Lord's service, but would want to if they did – is disturbing. As well as leaving a great number of Christians deeply frustrated, it seriously limits the impact the Christian community can hope to make in the world.

- **APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP** As the last in this list of points, I want to raise the issue of high-level Christian leadership. The Twelve and Paul, most would agree, were apostles in a unique and unrepeatable way. But there were apostles such as Andronicus and Junias (Rom 16:7), Silas and Timothy (1 Thess 2:6; cf 1:1), at work during NT times too. In Ephesians 4:11-13, apostles are first in the list of those who 'prepare God's work for works of service' until such time in the future as 'we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ'. Apostles – real ones – can be many things. But they tend to have these characteristics: they're pioneers, opening up new territory (which needn't be geographical). They're leaders, and trainers, of leaders. They're 'big picture' people. They're entrepreneurs – bringing together the different factors which make for the extension of God's Kingdom. They create helpful structures. They fight for truth. And they ensure appropriate discipline is maintained. We can be grateful to that part of Pentecostalism and the Charismatic Movement influenced by (the somewhat questionable) Restoration teaching for bringing the need for present-day apostles to our notice<sup>16</sup>. The Church has always had need of apostles – and always had some. George Whitfield and John Wesley were apostles, but have not often been called such. Charles Grandison Finney and John Wimber likewise. In the historic denominations, bishops have been understood to occupy the place of the apostles (in the 'apostolic

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<sup>16</sup> Some of what the New Church apostles have modelled has been helpful, some considerably less than helpful.

succession'). Some of them really have functioned as apostles in certain dimensions, at least, of their ministry – like Pope John XXIII, who called the reforming Second Vatican Council, or Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa, who helped his nation escape 'apartheid' peacefully, (whatever one might think of a variety of theological positions these men took). The two points I want to make here are these: we need to recognise apostles for what they are; and we need far more of them, and far more apostolic ministry, than we have at the moment. Perhaps the lack of competent leaders and trainers of leaders is our most pressing problem.

Sadly, this list could be a lot longer, were it meant to be exhaustive. Having written so much that's negative, though, I want to suggest that, as regards the long term at least, there's every reason to be optimistic. Optimistic because of the new thing the Lord has been constructing within the old Christendom institutional Church, and alongside it.

### **The largely-hidden renewal of the Church**

It may well be that 'the Second Reformation' is already well under way. If so, it's hard to know when best to date its commencement. Perhaps it began in the worst days for the Church in the West, in the 1800s, when liberal theology was taking the foundations from under it, and scepticism had overtaken the educated and privileged classes in society. Because, paradoxically, at this very time the Western Church engaged in a stupendous overseas missionary effort, which was as extensive as it was sacrificial. Extensive – nothing like it had ever been seen before on that scale. Sacrificial – missionaries went out not knowing whether they would ever come home, and many never did.

It didn't just affect the nations which received the missionaries. In responding to the call, the missionaries, by their faithfulness – certainly the evangelical ones, but maybe the liberal and Catholic ones too – were reinforcing a set of renewing

impulses the Lord had sent the Church in tough times: those of seeking after holiness and a more intimate relationship with God, and of engaging in new and more systematic ways of evangelism and discipleship. One result in Britain of all this, which was largely a by-product of what had been happening in the USA, was to produce within evangelical university student groups a very strong form of Christianity which proved well able to propagate itself. The American evangelists, Moody and Sankey, visiting Britain in the later 1800s, significantly contributed to this renewing impulse. All the while, sadly, theological liberalism was undermining parts of this new evangelicalism. Even so, foundations were being laid which would enable the rebuilding of a Bible-based Christianity with life in it, after the catastrophe of World War 1 – although this can hardly have been understood at the time.

Ten years before the start of that war, the famous Welsh Revival of 1904-5 took place. This was even more a movement of the Spirit among young people than the new evangelicalism. It's not clear what the Revival did in the short term for Wales itself once it was over, but its most important fruit would come when its spiritual dynamic migrated to Azusa Street in Los Angeles, so launching modern Pentecostalism<sup>17</sup> – the primary force driving today's dramatic expansion of Christianity worldwide. Not until after World War 2 did Pentecostalism come into its own. And in the 1960s it really showed its power – by invading the historic denominations such as the Roman Catholic and Anglican Communion, to form the Charismatic Movement. Then it started spawning all sorts of new kinds of churches, and is still doing so. Many efforts have been made to tame this work of the Spirit – I'm referring to the genuine part of it – but, ultimately, they don't seem to succeed.

In between the World Wars, in England, something happened that might be thought rather strange, and unlikely to produce the impressive results it did. An

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<sup>17</sup> I say this on the authority of Frank Bartleman, who was the intercessor associated with Azusa Street. See his challenging and instructive book *Another Wave of Revival*; 1982; Springdale PA, USA; Whitaker House; ISBN 0-88368-111-0.

eccentric unmarried evangelical Anglican clergyman, E H J Nash, started to run Christian camps for boys from England's top 20 private male boarding schools for boys (misleadingly known as 'public schools'). These camps attracted some extraordinarily gifted teenage boys. 'Bash' – as Rev. Nash was universally known – had just two gifts and passions in life: personal evangelism and discipleship. John Stott is probably the most famous product of the 'Bash camps', but a whole generation of capable, evangelistically-minded Christian leaders was thrown up by his ministry; directly – as with Dick Lucas – or indirectly – as in the case of David Watson. These people strengthened the undergraduate work in the universities before they went on, in a great many cases, to be ministers in the state church. The Church of England has been transformed by what they've done, through their Bible teaching, and their evangelism and discipleship programmes.

Lounging in a hot bath in 1953, Derek Prince, newly appointed to lead a Pentecostal congregation in north London, heard the Lord say that revival was coming to Britain. "You can't imagine," he said, "how dreary and depressing it was in North London on a foggy day like that one, less than ten years after the War had ended." Yet within 12 months Billy Graham had begun his Haringay Crusade in the same part of the city. It caught the nation's attention. Graham and others wondered afterwards whether there'd have been a full-blown revival had he cancelled still more of his future engagements than in fact he did, and stayed on. He not only saw a great many conversions. Once again, Christian leaders with significant evangelistic gifts turned out to be the strategic fruit of his work at that stage. And this time, denominations like the Methodists and Baptists benefited, as well as the state church. (Dr Graham is, of course, himself a Baptist). A mission he did in Scotland seems to have had a similar impact on that nation – which, at that time was much more Christianised than England, and so at a different point in the cycle leading down towards post-Christianity. Perhaps this kind of strategic intervention from Heaven is itself a sort of revival – but not of the kind we expect.

The Second Vatican Council in 1962 showed the capacity of Catholicism to surprise itself as much as it would the rest of the Church. Pope John XXIII, who called the Council, prayed that the Holy Spirit would blow through the (Catholic) Church. It seems that that happened. Things could never be the same again. In its *Decree on Ecumenism* (para. 6), Vatican 2 asserted: 'Christ summons the Church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that continuing reformation of which she always has need' in so far as she has 'deficiencies in conduct, in church discipline, or even in formulation of doctrine'. Such words, coming from the Catholic institution, are revolutionary talk – official revolutionary talk. These, and other utterances like them, can't be taken back. They do indeed have to be put alongside other statements and claims with virtually the opposite message. But there's now a real debate within Catholicism. The infallible church which never changes has a new openness. Under the papacy of John Paul II there was a conservative reaction in various areas of Catholic life – for instance, in autocratic papal rule, and in giving Our Lady and the saints particular prominence. John Paul II seemed to abandon himself, after the attempt on his life, and especially in his later years, to the care of Our Lady of Fatima<sup>18</sup>. But the liturgy is still in people's native tongue, not Latin (as it used to be). Bible reading is still encouraged. And, because of a serious shortage of priests, the laity are being freed to contribute meaningfully in church life. Assessing what's happening in the Catholic Church can defeat even Catholic commentators. Those of us on the outside are still less well placed to do so. But I remember, some years ago, talking with a group of Catholic academics, on the staff of various seminaries or Catholic theology faculties, and their saying to me: "It's alright for your lot, David, you've had your Reformation. We've yet to have ours." There's a hunger amongst Catholics at other levels for change, too.

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<sup>18</sup> Believing, as he did, that Our Lady of Fatima had saved his life from a would-be assassin's bullet.

The invasion of historic Christianity by Pentecostalism has resulted in a host of positive developments. A lot of church life now is relaxed and informal: “come as you are”. This has helped Christians relate more easily to one another, as well as to the Lord. (If there’s too casual an attitude towards God today, as can be the case, this is largely a reaction against the unhelpful way things used to be – and probably a temporary state of affairs). Modern-style musical worship has helped us transition from a too-often unspiritual singing of doctrine to a worship from the heart, of the Triune God who created, rescued, guides and sustains us. This, in turn, has been allowing the best of the traditional hymns to be rediscovered; which was always going to happen – they just mean a lot more now. In a variety of ways, believers have been released into emotional freedom. The lack of this used to leave believers in an invisible prison, and caused important areas of personal growth to be stunted.

At the fringes of church life the existence of demons was ‘rediscovered’ – and measures developed to deal with them. Deliverance ministry<sup>19</sup> is by now considered comparatively normal. Angels too have been known to appear – and if this is still exceptional, there are a large number of believers who’d be more than open to seeing, if not actually meeting, one. Frank Peretti’s novels have opened up the imagination of evangelicals and others to the existence of a world peopled by spirits. ‘Spiritual mapping’ – seeking to see the world through spiritual as well as physical eyes, and then map it for good and evil influences – has been an important by-product of developments such as these: we need to be able to see the world as it really is, not just as it appears on the surface. The generality of theologians and church leaders now needs to catch up in the area of spiritual reality. After too many rather ill-advised attempts at ‘spiritual warfare’<sup>20</sup>, there’s now a reasonable consensus that this is both a legitimate and helpful activity, and a measure of agreement as how, wisely, to go about it. Spiritual evil needs to

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<sup>19</sup> The exorcism – as it used to be known – of people as opposed to places.

<sup>20</sup> Spiritual warfare is taking action against spiritual evil at any level by taking authority over it and expelling it – exorcism being one traditional form of this.

be dealt with at more than just a personal level; and it's been shown, in our own age as in the early Christian centuries, that this is possible.

By the 1980s a serious attempt was being made by the Universities and Colleges Christian Fellowship (UCCF) in Britain to encourage evangelical undergraduates to relate their beliefs to their studies. Stress was laid on the need to cultivate 'a Christian mind' – to think biblically about every aspect of life. The challenge was accepted, and is now bearing fruit across the spectrum of academic disciplines. No longer is evangelical Christianity content to be confined to the private sphere of life. Likewise, Catholics have been active in applying faith to life, and making their voices heard. The combination of the two groups – which used mercilessly to unchurch each other, but now work together increasingly on shared concerns – is observably beginning to impact national life (for instance, in the area of abortion legislation). Because this kind of thing has been happening both in the USA and elsewhere in the West, Christian perspectives are starting to affect decision-making at the international level too (at the United Nations, say). This works at the negative level, of protest – essential in today's rapidly de-Christianising West – and positively, in the presentation of constructive proposals for new and better policies and legislation. These are early days, but the trend is clear.

Since the 1990s – the 'Decade of Evangelisation' for Catholics, 'of Evangelism' for Anglicans and others – evangelism has come to be accepted as a normal part of church life again. The 'Decade' has been reckoned a failure by some respected leaders – for reasons one can understand. But surely the embracing of evangelism as a value by the Church in general – including its Catholic part – when it had been off the mainstream agenda for so long, is a major victory. Now we need to find ways which will take us beyond the Alpha Course and its counterparts, such that evangelism becomes basic to Christian life. But a lot of Christians are up for this. Much work has been done in parallel – with the developing of church-planting and cell-church strategies – in response to the

church growth teaching of Donald McGavran and others in the 1980s. There's great potential here; not least in the key question that's been thrown up: what do we actually *mean* by 'church'? What *is* a 'church' exactly?

The new Millennium has seen another Christian basic restored to mainstream church life: personal and corporate prayer. In fact, prayer ministries and networks had already been developing across the Western world, especially in the 1990s. Those who've specialised in prayer ministry over the years have been led in a variety of unexpected, but important, directions. Let me mention just one: reconciliation ministry; saying sorry – and meaning it – to those whom my group (whatever that is) have wounded in the past. British intercessors apologising to the Australians generally – for Britain's founding modern Australia as a slave colony – and to the Aboriginals in particular, whose land it had always been, and who suffered so much. German intercessors apologising to the Jews – above all for the Holocaust. Pope John II apologising to Jews, the Eastern Orthodox Church, Protestants, and others, on behalf of the Catholic Church – and breaking important taboos in the process. This has spilled out into the rest of the world. Tony Blair, the British Prime Minister, for instance, apologising to Ireland for the unforgivable refusal of the rest of Britain to help the Irish during the great Potato Famine of the 1870s<sup>21</sup>. Britain and the Irish Republic have enjoyed friendly relations ever since – unthinkable before that apology.

Finally, in this incomplete account of the new thing going on, let me mention the renewed involvement in what used to be called missionary work overseas. After decades of having lost interest in other nations, a real passion for involvement with them is rising again amongst European Christians. The old imperialistic attitudes and sense of racial superiority can't have disappeared completely, but the impression conveyed by those who commit to this ministry is uniformly one of servant friendship and true partnership. Exasperation and frustration are still part of the experience, as individuals from a privileged, technological, Western culture

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<sup>21</sup> Ireland being, at that time, an integral part of Britain.

encounter various facets of its very opposite. Needless to say, that's what Christian leaders from the spiritually-alive parts of the non-Western world can feel too when they come here, hardly able to credit the degenerate, unspiritual life around us we ourselves have become resigned to. The new wave of Western cross-cultural mission – in both its short- and long-term forms – seems to me as significant development as any indicating emergence of new church life from within the collapsing old order.

So much for my highly subjective overview of the state of things today. The question is: how did we get to this point? What's been going on? Can we, by looking at the past, come to gain a better perspective on the present and a fuller understanding of what we're really up against – and see the advantages and opportunities we're blessed with for what they are? Most of the rest of the book will consider relevant parts of the West's story, in the belief that this will prove as illuminating as useful.