



# St John's Lent Course Notes

## April 6<sup>th</sup> 2022 - Session 5

### Changing Century and Changing Future

#### Introduction

- Conclusion of our journey through 2000 years of church history, beginning with the Acts of the Apostles; uncovering the deliberations and influence of the Church Fathers; travelling the road to the Reformation through the dark and middle ages; two weeks ago looked at the legacy of the Reformation in the work of the Reformers; the Romans; the Radicals and the Revivalists- individuals who changed the spiritual landscape of the West. Last week we explored the century of change covering the period roughly from 1850-1950

#### 1. The Landscape of these Times!

- The Enlightenment has spawned two false dawns
- (a) **The rise of theological liberalism**
- The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Enlightenment- period of scientific rationalism where the new gods of science and technology were worshipped- more of this in a moment- the churches response to this was an emasculated form of the Gospel called liberalism whereby the virgin birth, the miracles and the supremely the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ were challenged, reinterpreted or even discarded
- (b) **The death of the "progress myth"**
- Education and human progress will solve all our problems

#### 2 The Legacy of these Times

##### (a) Post Modernism

Series of shifts in the way that people think and act- they do it without thinking- we have been socially conditioned

1. We have moved from a God centred view of life, the universe and everything to a man centred view
2. We have moved from a collective perspective to an individual perspective
3. We have moved from collective responsibility to personal autonomy
4. We have moved from a Big Story to a series of side shows
5. We have moved from public morality and truth to privatised morality and truth (shop around in the supermarket of truth)
6. We have moved from singularism to pluralism
7. We have moved from certainty to doubt -"apocalyptic doubt"



### **(b) The Age of Aquarius – New Age Spirituality**

- A cocktail of Eastern mysticism and religious practice; pre Christian superstitions and the occult. Matters of belief are settled by a “pick and mix” approach creating a continually changing concoction of the beliefs that we like

The common threads in all this are

- (a) Common History**- pre Christian and Eastern
- (b) Common Theology**-Jesus Christ is not unique God is “within us”
- (c) Common Philosophy** -existentialism

### **3 The Challenges of our Times**

- Post modernism
- Existentialism
- Secularization
- Pluralism
- Inclusion
- Liberalism
- Aggressive Rationalism (eg Richard Dawkins)
- Consumerism
- Materialism
- Hedonism -The cult of pleasure

### **4 The Internal stresses on the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Church**

**(a) A decline in church attendance**

**(b) Fragmentation and Consumerism**

**(c) Ageing Demographics**

**(d) Loss of children and young people**

**(e) Breakdown of the parish system**

**(f) A move from “neighbourhood” churches to “network” churches**

### **5 New Developments and Changes**

**(a) Church growth in certain traditions and areas (The majority world and BMC's in the west)**

**(b) Global charismatic movement**



**(c) A move for “Crusade” evangelism to “Process” Evangelism (Alpha, Christianity Explored, START etc)**

**(d) Roman catholic renewal**

**(e) Festival Faith**

**(f) Abundant Resources and Specialised Ministries( inc parachurch organisation combining mission with social concerns)**

**(g) Digital Communication**

**(h) Revival of community and contemplative life**

**(i) Rediscovery of Art, Colour and Music and Dance**

**(j) Women in leadership**

**(k) Multiple Bible Translations**

**(l) Fresh Expressions**

## **6 What of the Future?**

**13 Characteristics of Growing Churches (A Bakers Dozen!)**

- 1. Eventful worship**
- 2. Accessible and flexible language and liturgy**
- 3. Investment in children and youth and All Age Worship**
- 4. A culture of welcome**
- 5. Clear Biblical preaching and teaching**
- 6. A commitment to prayer**
- 7. Shared leadership and every member ministry**
- 8. Small groups**
- 9. Process Evangelism**
- 10. Social action and community involvement**
- 11. A concern for the wider church**
- 12. Multi -congregational models**
- 13. VISION!**



**“I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it”  
Jesus (Matt 16)**

**Discussion points**

- 1. What are the key elements for you in the story of the church ?**
- 2. What lessons from the past do we need to learn for the future?**
- 3. What are key challenges facing a church like ours?!**