

S T U D Y G U I D E



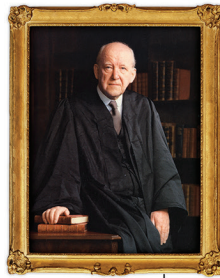
PART 6

ANNO DOMINI
1900-2000

A SURVEY OF

Church History

W. ROBERT GODFREY



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A Survey of Church History

Part 6, AD 1900–2000

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A Remarkable Century

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century was a remarkable century, encompassing the best and the worst of human history. In this lesson, Dr. Godfrey introduces some of its major events and the way the church adapted to its problems and opportunities.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

To introduce the main historical events and trends affecting the church in the twentieth century

SCRIPTURE READING

The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

—Matthew 12:18b

LECTURE OUTLINE

- A. The twentieth century is an important century to study despite its proximity to us.
 - 1. There is still a considerable amount of this century that is often neglected.
 - a. Many people alive today experienced the twentieth century, but there is much that they did not experience.
 - b. We have a tendency to focus on the present and the immediate past.
 - 2. Even those of us who lived before 1940 or 1930 do not entirely remember.
 - a. This is good to remember because one of the most important events of the twentieth century, the First World War, happened before 1920.
- B. The events of the twentieth century range from some of the best in human history to some of the worst.
 - 1. The twentieth century was a century of great advancement in the natural and medical sciences, economic opportunity, and democratic government.

- a. These advances dramatically increased life expectancy.
- b. Economic opportunity and the spread of democracy increased the freedom of many people in the twentieth century.
2. The twentieth century was a century of great migrations.
 - a. The African-American population in the United States dramatically changed: 90 percent of the population in the rural South shifted to 66 percent in the urban North.
 - b. Hispanic immigration was a considerable force in the twentieth century.
 - c. Even today, we are seeing the impact of Muslim immigration from the Middle East into Europe during the twentieth century.
3. The twentieth century was the most murderous century in the history of mankind.
 - a. Millions of people died in World War I and World War II.
 - b. Joseph Stalin killed millions, particularly in Ukraine, in his attempt to change agriculture in the Soviet Union.
 - c. Mao Zedong killed millions during the Chinese Civil War and the Cultural Revolution.
 - d. Advances in military technology amplified the violence of the twentieth century; though human beings were probably no more evil in the twentieth century than they were before, they were more capable of carrying out evil intentions.
4. In addition to the rise of democracy during the twentieth century, dictatorships replaced traditional governments in many places.
 - a. Vladimir Lenin replaced Czar Nicholas II and Mao Zedong replaced the president.
 - b. It is difficult to assess whether such changes were improvements for people because we do not have the long view of events.
 - c. The rise of dictatorships and the rise of democracy had a significant impact on the church, because the church had to live through and react to such changes.
5. The twentieth century was a century of incredible missionary growth.
 - a. The church has grown dramatically in China in the twentieth century despite the efforts of officials to repress it.
 - b. Though historians cannot perfectly understand the mind of God and are limited to studying human motivations, actions, and outcomes, the missionary growth of the twentieth century shows that God has been at work.
 - c. The missionary activity in China during the nineteenth century produced little fruit and missionaries were even expelled, but the growth of the church in the twentieth century proves that God sovereignly grows the church despite all human efforts to stop it.
 - d. The church also experienced growth in Korea, Nigeria, and South America.

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- e. Historians remark that the real center of Christianity moved south of the equator and to the east because of growth in Africa, South America, and Asia.
 - f. Abraham Kuyper believed that God was constantly moving the church west, because it started in the Middle East before moving to North Africa into Europe and then to America; he predicted that Asia and Japan would be the next great center of Christian growth.
 - g. Kuyper may not have been right, but the movement of the church serves as a warning to American Christians not to be proud and self-confident, presuming on the strength of the church.
6. The twentieth century was a century of intellectual challenges to Christianity.
- a. The anti-Christian challenges of the nineteenth century did not empty the churches but primarily controlled the universities.
 - b. In the twentieth century, secularism began to have an influence beyond the intellectual elite to affect churches, particularly in Europe.
 - c. Secularism became not just an ideology but a way of life that focuses on the here and now—secularism is derived from the Latin word for “age,” “this age.”
 - d. Secularism became the dominant attitude in the West during the twentieth century and to this day remains a threat to Christianity.
 - e. Secularism is unlike intellectual challenges about belief and unbelief of the nineteenth century, but it is rather a struggle between belief and false belief.
 - f. Islam became a revived influence at odds with Christianity during the twentieth century.
 - g. Communism, though now declining as an attractive ideology, was a considerable challenge to Christianity in the twentieth century along with nationalistic ideologies of fascism.
- C. Five reactions to Christianity will help us to look at the twentieth century: Christianity attacked, established, accommodated, defended, and revived.
1. The first reaction is Christianity attacked or Christianity rejected.
 - a. The intellectual attacks on Christianity that began in the nineteenth century were more effectively undermining the life of the church.
 2. The second reaction is Christianity established.
 - a. In the nineteenth century, churches in Europe attempted to establish Christianity by law to protect against unbelief and immorality.
 - b. In the twentieth century, efforts to establish Christianity by law declined as established churches lost significance.
 - c. An example of this changing attitude is how Prince Charles said that when he is crowned king of England, he would like to change the monarch’s title from “protector of the faith” to “protector of the faiths.”
 - d. This would accurately represent the current pluralism of England and the weakness of the established Church of England.

3. The third reaction is Christianity accommodated.
 - a. The attempt to accommodate Christianity to a modernist worldview was still prevalent in the twentieth century.
 - b. Liberal accommodation was nonetheless on the decline because it was useless to accommodate Christianity to a world that no longer cared.
 - c. Mainline churches all declined in numbers and influence, leaving the impression that not many people cared what these churches believed.
 - d. Even today, there is not one Protestant justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, which does not seem to cause any concern.
 - e. Roman Catholicism made some accommodations to the twentieth century at the Second Vatican Council.
4. The fourth reaction is Christianity defended.
 - a. J. Gresham Machen was one of the leaders of the intellectual response to liberalism in the early twentieth century.
 - b. Cornelius Van Til was also a great apologist of the faith.
 - c. Contemporaries such as D.A. Carson and R.C. Sproul are incredible defenders of the faith.
 - d. R.C. Sproul possesses the rare skill of teaching laymen the essential truths and defenses of Christianity at a high intellectual level.
5. The fifth reaction is Christianity revived.
 - a. Christians in the twentieth century still longed to see Christianity revived.
 - b. Korea and Nigeria both experienced great revival in the twentieth century.
 - c. Billy Graham was a beacon of the revivalist tradition in America during the twentieth century.
 - d. The strongest indication of the revivalist spirit during the twentieth century was the rise of Pentecostalism.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Democracy was a wider phenomenon in the twentieth century than dictatorial government.
 - a. True
 - b. False
2. _____ believed that God was constantly moving the church west.
 - a. J. Gresham Machen
 - b. Cornelius Van Til
 - c. Abraham Kuyper
 - d. Billy Graham

3. The forces of secularism were detrimental to European churches.
 - a. True
 - b. False

4. Secularism is derived from the Latin word meaning _____.
 - a. Reality
 - b. World
 - c. One
 - d. Age

5. The trend that significantly declined as a reaction to the movements of the twentieth century was Christianity _____.
 - a. Established
 - b. Defended
 - c. Attacked
 - d. Revived

6. _____ was *not* a defender of the Christian faith in the twentieth century.
 - a. R.C. Sproul
 - b. J. Gresham Machen
 - c. Cornelius Van Til
 - d. Abraham Kuyper

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How is the movement of the church throughout the centuries a warning to American Christians?

2. Why are attempts to accommodate Christianity in the twentieth century on decline?

3. Define secularism. How do you see secularism manifested today?

4. What is the most difficult thing to know as we study history? What is the most important thing to remember?

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