



## WHAT IS THE MODERN CHURCH?



WHEN WE USE the word *modern*, we usually mean something *new*. But since all things are new at one time or another, we need to be more specific when we talk about the *modern church*. In this book, the modern church refers to the period of time starting just before the beginning of the nineteenth century and continuing to today. That's right—you are part of the modern church! But you are at the tail end of it, and life was pretty different when this period began.

So this book will focus mostly on the early years of the modern church—the part that most of us are less familiar with—and then lead us back to the present day.

Since things were so different at the beginning of the modern period, let's start with a little introduction. The most important thing to keep in mind about this period is that it has been a time of very big and very rapid changes! Christians from every background struggled to apply their faith to the challenges of this ever-changing world.

Remember the eighteenth-century movement called the *Enlightenment*? Enlightenment thinkers emphasized the use of human reason for understanding the universe. They were suspicious of religious authorities, like the Bible and the church. They believed that organized religion was just a human invention and the cause of many of the world's problems. So they argued that if we would just trust in science and education instead of religion, we could build a better world. This was the foundation of the modern period, and people born at the beginning of it grew up thinking this way.

### A WORLD OF CHANGES

Since people had a new confidence in their ability to improve the world, they got busy doing it. Things started changing in every area of life. Government changed, because of a push for *democracy* throughout the world. Medicine changed, as our knowledge of science improved—and as it did, the world's population grew. In fact, in the years between 1850 and 1950—just 100 years—the world's population doubled! That meant we had a lot more people to feed, and since old farming methods no longer provided enough food, *agriculture* changed, too. Manufacturing changed when machines were invented that could work faster than humans, and more efficient mills and factories were built. And communities changed, as huge numbers of people began to move from the country into cities, where all the new industry offered them jobs.

As you might guess, this created a new problem. Cities began to *overpopulate*, plunging a lot of people into terrible working and living conditions. The world had never faced a problem quite like this, and the old ways from previous centuries didn't offer any solutions—so once again, people put their heads together and came up with more changes.

Over the next century and a half, the technology available in cities spread into other areas. New forms of transportation provided a way to live outside the city but go back into it every day for work.

So those who could afford it moved out to the suburbs, leaving a generally poorer population living in the cities. As a big part of the workforce moved out to the suburbs, so did manufacturers. Soon cities were no longer the centers of manufacturing, but of business, education, entertainment, and art—and also, unfortunately, centers of violence and poverty. Another new problem!

Again, people called for change. So new laws were passed and *labor unions* formed to protect workers and their families—and to keep industries from taking advantage of a labor force that included a lot of children. And to keep governments responsible, greater rights were given to citizens. But these laws did not erase injustice, which took many forms. Some Christians, who saw these issues ultimately as the result of sin, believed the gospel called them to get involved. In fact, in many cases, it was Christians who led the charge to make sure people were cared for during all these rapid changes.

### A SHRINKING WORLD

From the middle of the 1800s to the early years of the new millennium, the world shrank. Well, the planet didn't actually get smaller, but several important inventions made it a lot easier—and faster—to travel and communicate between countries.

Radios, developed at the end of the nineteenth century, led to the first radio station, which began broadcasting in 1920 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Suddenly, people could talk to each other across great distances.

In 1903, in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, brothers Orville (1871-1948) and Wilbur (1867-1912) Wright made the first plane flight. Soon, instead of traveling for weeks across the ocean by ship, people were flying to other countries in just a matter of hours. Today, just over a century after the first airplane flight, astronauts live in space and send roving robotic explorers to other planets.

The invention of the computer is another big one. The technology developed to improve computers has provided a

lot of other advances in medicine and other sciences. With the rise of the internet in the late twentieth century, people can communicate across the globe instantly. And that has connected local *economies* (financial systems) into a global economy.

Global economy, global internet, global travel—modern Christians realized it would take a global church to cover the world with the gospel.

### GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

The very first Christians were given a mission to “go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). In the first few centuries of the church, they did this by setting up monastic communities that ministered to their neighbors or by traveling and planting churches. Later, when Christianity became linked with empire, the church grew through military might, like during the Medieval *Crusades*, when organized Christianity was sent abroad—but at the cost of exchanging the gospel of peace for the sword. Similarly, during the *Reformation*, nations went to war over differences between Catholics and Protestants. And in the generations after that, it wasn’t just the differences between Catholics and Protestants that caused friction; it was also the differences between Protestants and Protestants.

By the beginning of the modern period, many Christians looked back on those turbulent centuries and longed for—you guessed it!—a change. Some believed that they should only emphasize the essential beliefs of the church so that minor differences would not keep them from working together. They wanted to seek unity instead of division, so some denominations merged together to become a stronger whole with a bigger impact for Christ. Other Christians resisted these efforts to unite, believing it would require them to sacrifice doctrinal purity. Since this would mean they had fewer resources, they focused on one kind of ministry or one part of the world they could effectively reach.

Either way Christians approached it, the effort of thinking through global issues brought about a new perspective on ministering to the world.

What was the new perspective? Christians began to act and think *globally*, meaning they were more aware of other cultures and the needs of people across the planet, not just their own country. And this brought about a new approach to missions. In previous centuries, Western missionaries (missionaries from the Western world, such as Britain and America) who delivered the gospel to foreign lands also delivered their Western culture. Converts were expected to dress and talk like the missionary did. But now, many Christians realized that being a Christian had nothing to do with wearing British or American clothing. It was about living out the gospel in every culture.

And it turns out that sin flourishes around the globe! As Christians arrived for the first time in other countries, they found great injustices that only the gospel could address. So they set out to rescue and redeem their fellow human beings—spiritually *and* physically.

#### AN ANCIENT GOSPEL FOR A MODERN WORLD

The stories in this book, covering the years from 1860 to the late 1900s, chronicle the labors of global Christians in places as diverse as Japan, China, Korea, the United States, India, Hawai‘i, Mexico, Germany, England, Uganda, and on the open seas between them. They are pastors (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Janani Luwum), royals (Princess Ka‘iulani), writers (C.S. Lewis), translators (John Ross and Marianna Slocum), samurai (Niijima Jō), missionaries (Robert Thomas, Samuel Moffet, and Hudson and Maria Taylor), educators (Pandita Ramabai), and evangelists (Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey). These are people who either lived their lives by their convictions or sacrificed their lives for their convictions.



## RESCUE AND REDEEM

These are stories of real Christians, taken from their diaries, letters, and books. They are told from their own perspectives, showing us how they understood their places in the Christian story. They did not all agree with each other on the teachings of the Bible. They did not all have the same level of influence—some are legendary and others are all but forgotten. They were sometimes wise, sometimes foolish. But they met the challenges of modern life with new ways of communicating the ancient gospel, seeking to be God's tools as he rescued his global people and redeemed them to new life in Christ.

