

September 10: Introduction and Overview:

1. **Course Outline:** Any requests for changes? Feedback on content or schedule.
2. **Intro Comments:** I'm hoping for lots of discussion, and we're going to face some challenges, like the ocean of resources available on the web. And, the gross historical and theological generalizations we'll be tempted by as we attempt to cover such significant thought and moments in history in a mere ten weeks. We'll be speaking of church and state, salvation, the authority of scripture, the corruptions of institutionalized religion, indeed the very nature of God and our relationships with him.

A reminder that the course is headed toward conversation about the state of the modern church. 500 years later have we lost our way again...or not? Are we in need of radical recovery of Christian truths? Reformation is from the Latin *reformatio*, literally "restoration, renewal, to shape again."

To whet our souls and minds as we prepare to grapple with immense concepts and movements, I offer you the views of a few twentieth century theologians who have strong opinions about the state of modern Christianity. I offer them to you not because I necessarily agree with every word, but because they will serve as our bellwether for our last few sessions which will look at the question, is Christianity in need of another Reformation or not? Warning, these may make us feel uncomfortable but are not any sort of comment on the ministers or people of First Baptist.

3. **Passages:**

- A. The majority of churches that exist today are organized spiritual business entities. They operate similarly to corporate America. There is a CEO, or Sr. Pastor. There is a Board of Directors, probably elders or deacons. There is a staff—either paid or volunteer. There are the customers—namely the lay people who come each week to financially underwrite the corporation/church. And finally, there is the product—their version of the gospel and its presentation. I personally shudder at using the term 'product' for the gospel, but in many churches that is what it has been reduced to. The spirit driving most of these 'corporation/churches' is self-preservation. They devise methods, practices and policies necessary to maintain their survival (*Tim Kurtz*).
- B. Over the last century, the church in America has suffered serious generational drift and decay. In every subsequent generation over the last century, the faith has become more fragmented, watered-down, superficial, and irrelevant. We have drifted from a vibrant faith rooted in the historic confessions, coherent theological convictions, and intelligent cultural engagement to a privatized faith that is indifferent to the past, theologically ignorant, and culturally irrelevant (*Michael Spencer*).
- C. Ironically, the billions of dollars we've spent on youth ministers, Christian music, publishing, and media has produced a culture of young Christians who know next to nothing about their own faith except how they feel about it. Our young people have deep beliefs about the culture war, but do not know why they should obey scripture, the

essentials of theology, or the experience of spiritual discipline and community. Coming generations of Christians are going to be monumentally ignorant and unprepared for culture-wide pressures (Michael Spencer).

- D. The thing that now goes by the name of 'Christianity' embraces between its two poles almost every conceivable complexion and inconsistency. At one pole it has the complexion of a liberalism which denies every fundamental truth - as to the person of Christ, the authority and trustworthiness of the Scriptures, the atoning work of the Cross, the bodily resurrection of Christ, and so on. But all this is included in the title 'Christianity'. At the other pole we have hard, cruel, bigoted legalism, which can resort to physical force and the use of lethal weapons for its defence or propagation (T. Austin Sparks).
- E. Religion today is not transforming people; rather it is being transformed by the people. It is not raising the moral level of society; it is descending to society's own level, and congratulating itself that it has scored a victory because society is smilingly accepting its surrender (A.W. Tozer).
- F. Two things about the Christian religion must surely be clear to anybody with eyes in his head. One is, that men cannot do without it; the other, that they cannot do with it as it is (Matthew Arnold).

Comments/Questions after each quotation.

All the above can be found at <http://www.christian-history.org/modern-christianity-quotes.html>

Concluding Prayer by Martin Luther:

Thy right hand and thy holy arm, O Lord, hath gotten thee the victory. Thou hast remembered thy mercy and thy truth to this generation. O God, our Father, make us to stand fast in the liberty wherewith thou hast made us free and enable us all to be faithful stewards of the Gospel thou hast entrusted to us, that our hearts may be established unblamable in holiness before thee at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." Amen.

Conclusion