



## The Church and Social Movement in 2020 - A Reflection

### 教會與2020社會運動的反思

劉振鏞牧師認為2020是充滿挑戰的一年。

除了COVID-19為世界各處帶來苦難和困局外，也引發或特顯了各種社會存在的問題及衝擊。去年發生的社會運動隱藏著許多值得教會憂慮並反思的問題。劉牧師例舉了六方面：美國與美國教會；粹民主義；基督徒身份；與黑暗同夥；基督教信念與公共政策；及邊緣社羣的關注。不但探討當中的問題所在，也提醒教會潛在的危機。

這些社會現象和文化趨勢只是教會面對現今問題的冰山一角，卻足以為教會帶來重大挑戰。教會必須重新審視她在地上的使命和角色，能在此愈加複雜並充斥著虛謊資訊的社會處境中，站在聖經的原則上去分辨，並裝備信徒，能對不同議題作出正確判斷及回應。在漫長的屬靈爭戰中，在地上為主作光和鹽。

There is no doubt that 2020 has been a year of crises. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused great havoc in human suffering, world economics, political governance, and human relationship. All these further aggravate the already volatile political landscape worldwide, in North America, Europe and Asia. Much has happened and will continue to happen in the world, in Canada and even more so in some other countries like the United States.

Paul exhorted the Church to "shine like stars in the universe." (Phil 2:15). Amidst all these crises, great is the challenge to the church to be the salt and light, the prophet, and the healer of the society, and dire is her failure to do so, as we observe in particular how the presidency of Donald Trump and the recent United State's election have impacted the church in the United States.

This article reflects on this particular challenge to the church as we embark on 2021.

#### The United States and the American Church

For the last four years, much has happened in the United States around President Trump. The American church has been put under the spot light because of the role of white evangelicals in his presidency. Lately the violent riots in the US capital on January 6 and the various responses from American religious leaders in the aftermath show how dangerously fractured is the (white) American church today.

At one end of extremism are the Trump-worshippers, Christians that perceive in him a saviour of near equal status as Christ, totally buying in all kinds of conspiracy theories and even falling into open alignment with some groups of violence.

Next in degree of extremism are the Christian nationalists who have merged their Christian identity with their national identity, and look to Trump for a protection of this identity. Then there are the moderate supporters, who acknowledge the flaws of Trump in morality and personal behaviour, yet offer their support nevertheless. Their support of Trump is more for his public policies that to them, protect the Christian heritage in the United States.

On the other side of the divide are Christians who express their opposition to Trump because of his morality and behaviour. They place a higher priority on the purity and integrity of the church than protecting the church's cultural influence and political power.

Then there is a third dimension of dissension, usually from the younger generation, who argue that white supremacy and racism runs deep in white American Christianity all through its history. It is time for deep soul searching for everyone in the American church, to acknowledge the church's deep historical aberration.

#### Populism

Behind the struggles of the United States in general and the American church in particular is the rise of populism, a movement we see also in parts of the world. A common denominator in its rise is the issue of immigration and demographic change that leads to a cultural and economic threat to a group of people, people who feel that their existing culture and heritage is being threatened or taken away. Political analysts like Fareed Zakaria pointed out, when a society faces crises, public policy tends to move left (more government intervention), and culture to right (more self-protection under threat).

American Christian nationalism is a subtle form of this movement, where some Christians perceive their Christian heritage is under threat. They see in Trump an "instrument of God" that will protect this heritage from a decaying American society.

#### On Christian Identity

What then is Christian heritage? Here are two reflection points.

How can Christian identity be distinguished properly and objectively from cultural and economic heritage? What is the proper understanding of Biblical teaching like 1Peter 2:9 and John 17:15-16, so as to develop a Biblical Christian identity that encompasses Christians of all cultures, rather than protecting a culture.

Then subjectively, how can I tell my so-called protection of Christian identity is not a disguise of protection of self-interests in cultural and economic advantages, that I have been using a Christian excuse for something selfish and morally wrong? When the church let "godliness" become a means to financial gain (1Tim 6:5), it will fall into grave darkness.

#### Accomplice to Darkness

From what has happened in Europe and the United States, we see a close linkage of populism, demographic change, racial hatred, and nationalism, and how all these degenerate into violence and extremism. The church should be deeply concerned with this trend, gain some wisdom from the struggles of the church in the United States, and be careful herself, less the church becomes accomplice to darkness.

Some Christians argue their support of a flawed political leader because of the political expedience so gained for some Christian cause. However, the behaviour of a leader like the president of the United States cannot be disregarded lightly, because it has tremendous influence in setting the cultural trend of a country. The support of some Christians for Trump's policy may have granted some debateable benefits, they may come at the grave expense of the country going down a very dark path due to the leader's personal influence and facilitation, for example the empowering of extremist militia groups.

The danger of a wrong turn of Christian identity to Christian nationalism and getting the church into association with violence and extremism is very possible. The German church and rise of Nazism in the 1930's is a lesson in history still much to be learned.

Canada values diversity. As our demography in Canada changes, the society is subject to the danger of racial hatred and populism too. It is a spiritual battle that the church must be on constant and intense alert, so as to fulfill its role externally as light and salt of the society, and to keep its integrity internally that church won't become accomplice to injustice and hatred.

#### Christian belief and public policy

Furthermore, the argument for the support of a public policy because it is believed to be more Biblical demands careful scrutiny. There are times when the answer is clear in principle like racial inequality, but not that straight forward in implementation like affirmative action. Here are some questions that don't have easy answers.

Christians are asked to be the light and salt of this world, through our life and the power of the Holy Spirit. But how much (at all) the Bible has entitled us to impose it onto the society through legislation? Remember the Crusade and Inquisition.

Is the protection of the rights of LGBTQ (and other rights like abortion) outright unbiblical? Or the outright disregard of the rights of LGBTQ more unbiblical? Christians will have different positions, and who are more biblical?

So when if ever, is it legitimate to "drag" God into one's own "Christian cause" in the debate of public policy? What's the Biblical guideline in this? Proper and relevant teaching in the church becomes very important.

#### Be mindful of the disenfranchised

Another reason for populism in North America, Europe and other places, is the rise of new social classes and elitism. Modern technology has put the knowledge workers, thus the educated and the "elite", much ahead economically. Political analysts suggest that Trump still gained the vote of 70 millions of Americans in the 2020 Election despite his many flaws because the Democrats failed to capture the heart of the less educated, the less economically well-off class. They argue how the meritocratic and elitism culture of the Democrats has deprived them of the empathy with the less fortunate, sending en masse the working class to Trump's camp. Democrats are asked to show more compassion, kinder words and less hubris with the poor, who may not even have the opportunity to try and compete.

There is much room of reflection for the church in this, in particular for the Chinese immigrant church in Canada. This first generation of Christians and their children have much to give thanks for the economic blessings and education opportunities they have. Unknowingly, the church may shut herself off from different social classes and retreat into gated communities in the company of our own kinds.

#### Conclusion

The challenge to the church to fulfill its role as salt and light is getting complex and difficult as the world evolves. This paper reflects just on some of the problems in the political landscape that become very acute in 2020. Other problems abound.

Then it is not just discerning the right Biblical response to the problems, the challenge is equally great if no greater efforts are devoted to equipping the saints. Today's culture of debate in sound-bites and tweets, and liking for answers that are easy to grasp and feel good to listen, are not for complex and hard problems.

Furthermore, discernment requires sound judgment, much more difficult today when social media have made both information and misinformation equally amplified. We are not necessarily more knowledgeable and more capable of making sound judgment. Instead we are groomed to become more opinionated, emotional and handicapped to healthy debate on complex and hard problems.

It will be an intense long-haul spiritual battle that requires much God's grace.

劉振鏞牧師 Rev. Terence Lau, retired minister and member of the Advisory Council of Hudson Taylor Centre. He was formerly the senior pastor of Zion Alliance Church and is now a Minister-at-large of the Christian & Missionary Alliance in Canada.



## 牧養關顧：持續學習和把握時機

### Pastoral Care : Learning and Making Use of Opportunities

在疫情嚴重的影響下，我們可以如何過生活？我們可以怎樣牧養關顧？經過2020年，進入2021年，上帝藉著不同機會提醒我要留心在牧養關顧上持續學習，把握時機過生活。還記得去年3月，我與其他牧者溝通和參加網上一些講座，我發現牧養關顧遇上極大的挑戰。在這過程中，有很多反省、掙扎、檢討和不安，我知道需要重新學習牧養關顧。

首先，上帝幫助我再學會接受祂的看顧，在生活中讓大牧者引導我、潔淨我、改變我和建立我。上帝又藉著其他的人用實際行動關顧我，叫我知道我是屬於上帝的群體，並謙卑接受關顧。此外，我在安全的情況下做運動，在跑步中鍛鍊身體，舒緩壓力，學習放鬆，在這過程裏禱告親近上帝。原來，上帝正在更新塑造我，我相信祂亦會更新塑造我們。上帝要塑造一群合祂意思，有牧者心和有實際牧養行動的人。

在過去一年經歷中，我再次肯定牧養關顧仍然是適切的，而上帝在我們周圍已預備了人。祂在各堂會中安排了祂的兒女，由牧者帶領眾人彼此牧養，而上帝又在我們身邊已預備了不少人是我們可以接觸的。我們可以在其中發揮創意，尋找適切的途徑牧養關顧眾人，就是牧養主的羊。在上帝的國度裡，按照我們的地步和處境，把握時機，配合上帝的時間和心意。這樣，我們過福音的生活，在牧養關顧中傳揚福音。

無論處境如何，在牧養關顧上，除了計劃、應變、改動以外，我們可以保持繼續學習和把握時機的態度。的確，上帝是我們的牧者，願祂的話鼓勵我們：「但願使人有盼望的上帝，因信將諸般的喜樂、平安充滿你們的心，使你們藉著聖靈的能力大有盼望！」(羅馬書15:13)

In the pandemic, how shall we live? How shall we practice pastoral care? As we went through 2020 and entered 2021, God has been reminding me to pay attention to the continual learning in pastoral care and in making use of opportunities. Last March, as I communicated with other pastors and attended online seminars, I discovered the deep challenges in pastoral care. In this process, I have gone through a journey of reflection, struggles, evaluation and restlessness. I know the need to learn again in pastoral care.

First, God helps me to learn to accept His care, to let the Great Shepherd to guide me, cleanse me, transform me, and build me. God also uses other's practical actions to care for me, this reminds me that I belong to God's community and I need to receive other's care with humility. Besides, I have been doing exercises under safe conditions. In running, I relax during stressful times and I spend time with God. In fact, God has been renewing me and nurturing me, and I believe He is renewing and nurturing all of us. God is nurturing those who will become people pleasing to Him, with pastoral hearts and actions.

In the past year, I have re-confirmed the relevancy of pastoral care, for He has prepared people for us. He has put His children in local congregations to care for one another under the pastors' leadership, and He has prepared people around us so we can reach them. With creativity, we seek for relevant ways to care for people — the sheep of the Lord. In God's kingdom, we make use of opportunities, following God's timing and will, right in our current situations. In our daily living, we live according to the gospel and we care pastorally to share the gospel.

No matter what situation we are in, apart from planning, adjusting, and changing, we keep on learning and making use of opportunities in pastoral care. Yes, God is our Shepherd. Let us be encouraged by His Word: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." (Romans 15:13)

韓錦昌牧師 Rev. Kevin Hon, Senior Pastor of Toronto Chinese Methodist Church and member of the Advisory Council of Hudson Taylor Centre.