

"Here is a clarion call to be taken very seriously."

— JAMES PENNER, lead author of *Hemorrhaging Faith*



RE:NEW

A Case for Spiritual Renewal in the 21st Century Church

JERVIS DJOKOTO

Foreword by Dr. George Wilfred Arthur

JERVIS DJOKOTO

Re:New – A Case for Spiritual Renewal in the 21st Century

Why Spiritual Renewal is Urgent

The Re:New Movement
RAISING RENEWAL CATALYSTS

First published by The Renew Movement 2021

Copyright © 2021 by Jervis Djokoto

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

Scriptures taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

*Scripture quotations marked TPT are from The Passion Translation®. Copyright © 2017, 2018, 2020 by Passion & Fire Ministries, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
ThePassionTranslation.com.*

Some scripture is taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved.

—

Author's Website: jervisdjokoto.com

Re:New Movement Website: therenewmovement.com

Editor: Deb Stratas

Cover Art: Natasha Djokoto

First edition

ISBN: 9798667678106

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

To my beloved wife, Robin, and our two children Evangeline and Joseph.

May God make us all renewal catalysts for His name's sake!

“[we]... look forward to the Age of the Spirit, in which the declining Church will be transformed and revived, the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon her people, and the everlasting Gospel will be proclaimed to the ends of the earth.”

— JOACHIM OF FIORE

Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	iv
<i>Acknowledgement</i>	vii
<i>Introduction</i>	xii
<i>How to read this book</i>	xii
<i>About this book</i>	xv
<i>Book Chapters and Parts</i>	xvi
<i>The Preamble</i>	xxii
<i>A New Global Terrain</i>	xxxii

I Part One

1 Environments that have Shaped this Book's Contents	3
Primary Contexts that have Shaped the Contents of this Book	4
2 Preliminary Journeys in Renewal: My Story	15
3 Preliminary Journeys: My Story (Part Two)	33

II Part Two

4 What is Spiritual Renewal?	51
Towards a Definition of Renewal	62
5 Major Shifts in Global Christianity	73
The Ongoing 'Pentecostalization' of Global Christianity	74
A Shift in the Center of Christianity	78

Making Sense of the Trends	79
Making Sense of the Shift in the Center of Gravity of Christianity	86
Initial Reflections for the North American Church	98
6 Trends of Spiritual Decline: The Quest for Solutions	102
The Signs of Sickness	108
Faithful Ways of Discerning Symptomatic Data	114
The Search/Quest for Solutions	122
Concluding Part Two: Journeying towards Renewal	131
III Part Three	
7 The Church's Unique Opportunity	139
Introduction to Part Three	139
Spiritual Renewal and the Church's Unique Role	140
Five Identity Markers of the Bearers of Good News	143
Chapter Summary	158
8 Where Shall we go from Here? —On Becoming a Renewal...	161
Two Powerful Reasons to Hope: For the North American Church and any other Context Experi- encing Spiritual Decline.	163
I. Maintaining a Rhythm of Ongoing Revitalization	167
II. Forming Renewal Hubs—Inviting others on the way to Revitalization	172
III. Prioritize Spirituality alongside other Struc- tural Issues	176
IV. Pastoring Spiritual Experiences	177
V. Wait for Isaac, No matter how long it Takes	180
VI. Collaboration, Partnerships and Church Unity	182
9 Where Shall we go from Here? —On Becoming a Renewal...	184

VII. Listening Prayer Notes: Thoughts on Renewal in the Canadian Context	184
VIII. Test all Things	186
IX. Renewal is a Love-Choice	193
X. Make Room For Jesus: Is Jesus Really Welcome?	202
XI. Check your Spiritual Temperature; Are you Hot or Cold?	205
10 Conclusion	209
A FINAL CALL TO ACTION	209
<i>Notes</i>	215
<i>About the Author</i>	224
<i>Also by Jervis Djokoto</i>	225

Foreword

My meeting with Pastor Jervis was timely and divine. It was perfectly God's grand design. Before my meeting him, he had received a prophecy of God leading him to a mentor, and the prophetic word vividly described me even though we had never met. God brought us together like a spiritual fishnet. Our union is like the nearest approximation of heaven on earth. The instant we met our heart was knit together in love and fellowship.

And I say the truth in Christ, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost that there are few men I've met personally with the passion I first saw in the eyes of Pastor Jervis. His passion for ministry as I met him first was so fiery; I suspected his family would think he was beside himself. I dare to say that he was clad with zeal like a cloak. Without exaggeration, it will be proper to call him a "word glutton." He has an intense and earnest craving for God's word. He is a voracious reader who burns the midnight candle in the quest for the deep things of God. We spent hours together in both teaching and sharing the word of God. He was always asking questions, especially matters that relate to doctrine and revival.

Pastor Jervis is a pen of a ready writer. The few months I spent in his house, one thing I realize was that he was with the laptop the entire day, almost every day. He was hungry for reality. He will hardly speak for twenty minutes on any subject without mentioning what God is about to do in his church in our time. His passion was to see Great renewal in our day. This is also reflected in his songs. Even the time we

spent fasting and praying in his house was all toward renewal and great awakening. So I am not surprised that “Renewal” is the subject for his first book.

Although there is a lot of research work in this book, I like you to know that the spirit behind the book is far beyond that. What is penned in the pages of this book is life and passion. It is the reality and the driven force of his life. It is what he has longed for all his life to see. And truly, the expectation of the righteous shall not be cut off. As you go through this book, you can have fellowship with the same spirit of inspiration until you are propelled by that same passion.

Also, the one thing I quickly noticed was that he has such love to see the oneness of the church and to see the greatest move of God in the church today. He demonstrated this by bringing together the ministries and churches affiliated with us for massive revival camp meetings.

David Olson, the director of the American Church Research Project, once said we live in a world that is post-modern, post-Christian and multi-ethnic. He is right. The present world is governed by multiple metanarratives; everyone seems to be doing what is good in their own eyes. Dense darkness is hovering over the earth. Everything seems to be motioning in a downward spiral. The solution to the present decadence in the world is the church. However, the majority of the church appears to be slumbering rather than blazing in the faith and fulfilling their divine role. The covid era has stirred and awakened many in the church to realize the urgency to fulfil their God-given mandate.

The church at present is not ready to fulfill her highest calling to the world. Yet, she has all that it takes to do that. The only way out is renewal. Her calling is vital to usher in our Lord’s coming. Renewal, therefore, is not optional but a necessity.

In this book, Pastor Jervis Djokoto, this loving and passionate servant of God, reveals to us the identity of the church, what the church is and what she is called to be. Only when the church discovers who she is and

risers to her identity can the world be impacted by her manifestative Glory. The church is the only hope the world has; Jesus said, “you are *the* light of the world” the definite article means there is no other light aside from the church. She is the unique solution to the world’s problems. The destiny of creation lies on the shoulders of the church. The liberation of creation from corruption is in our hands. The whole creation is waiting earnestly for her manifestation. The present challenge of the church is her unused abilities; she doesn’t know what she has and her capabilities. We have been stuck in our old trend of doing things; therefore, we have had little success and impact. This is why we need renewal.

This book is a tool for effective studies both on personal and institutional levels. It is an edible substance for the soul seeking the deep things of God and a teaching material for college training. It is informative, instructive and edifying. It also presents cross-cultural perspectives of Christianity. The church in Africa has her unique gift, and so does the church in America. Yet, many are unaware of God’s amazing gift to believers in different parts of the world. If we learn from each other, we will be twice better. Pastor Jervis is well experienced; having lived on two different continents, he presents to us what we can learn from each other to fulfill our calling as the church.

— Rev. Dr. George Wilfred Arthur

Acknowledgement

“We live in an interdependent world in which each event must be seen as part of an endless flow of preceding causes and succeeding consequences. Nothing exists in isolation.”

— **Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen**

This book’s contents and the rest in the *Re:New series* are the product of many related events and people. It will be impossible to attempt to name everyone or every situation contributing to this volume’s contents. However, I will try to name a few, specifically, those who have been close midwives helping to birth this book.

Firstly, I thank God for His long-term plan in preparing me both amidst sour and sweet times. I’m grateful for the Christian parents He gave me, the Country and culture into which I was born, and all the formative Christian training I received because of these. I owe everything I do now in my life and ministry to God’s providential grace!

Also, to my dear wife Robin for your continued support! Amidst all the responsibilities we have as a family—with work, ministry demands, house chores and raising our children—there’s no way I could have had the margin of time to finish this book without your loving support. I love you very much, and I’m grateful to God for you! And to Deb, my mother-in-law and the proficient editor of this book. Thank you. You also gave me an office space in your home when my wife (your daughter)

and I first moved to Canada. Plus, more recently, a brand-new Mac computer to help me with all my music, ministry work and writing. I've spent many hours on the computer you gave me writing large portions of this book. Also, because of your help with the kids, my wife and I have had time for date nights and space for me to work on projects like this one. You are part of the story of this book. We appreciate you.

To Jerby Djokoto and the entire book launch team—for all who supported and served in all aspects of the launch—for your hard work and trust in the vision, which God had laid on my heart. You received that vision as yours and served to see others embrace it as theirs too. I couldn't have done this without you. And to Natasha Djokoto for your work on all the book covers and designs towards the book launch. I appreciate all your insights, creativity and support!

And to my Beta readers (I couldn't name you all here), for your time and input. Your observations, suggestions, recommendations, critical and constructive feedback on the first draft of the manuscript, was invaluable in shaping this book. Thank you all very much! Also to James Penner, Dr. George, Dan Sheffield, and Jon Thompson for reading through the manuscript, and giving me your feedback and review.

Also, to my friends, colleagues, Pastors, and congregants of the different Churches and Ministries I've served in the past ten or so years, [Particularly Worshippers Ministry International (Ghana), & Sanctus Church (Canada)]. You mean so much to me! God gave you to me as the practical ministry context to help me grow, test out, practice, learn, and advance in most theological reflection areas I now write about here. I'm who I am today because of the experience I had working with you in these contexts. And to my good friends, Mentors, Pastors, and Professors in Ghana and Canada — to Rev. Dr. George Wilfred Arthur (Mentor, Ghana), Prophet Prince Manasseh-Atsu (Senior Pastor, Watered Gardens, Ghana), Donald Geortz (Program Director, Mdiv Course, Canada), Rev. Dan Sheffield (Pastor & Professor,

Mdiv Tyndale, Canada), Dr. Jonathan Thompson (Lead Pastor, Sanctus Church, Canada), John And Lorraine Baergen (Church Renewal mentorship, Canada), Dr. Van Johnson (Dean, Master's Pentecostal Seminary), Dr. A.J. Swoboda (Program Director, Doctor of Ministry program, Fuller)—and more recently to my fellow Ghanaian/African theologians living in North America, Jackson Adamah and Ebenezer Adu-Gyamfi—thank you all for your friendship, support, prayers, and guidance since I've known you. And to all my other ministry friends and teams both in Ghana and Canada—you are all a substantial part of my life and the story of this book.

“As the Western Church is in decline and the Global Church is exploding, the question before us is how does renewal take place in both contexts long-term? This book is one of many being written by the next generation of global Christian scholars that is so encouraging and needed right now. Jervis has brought together biblical insight, robust theological reflection, has used his personal journey to give a strong way to move forward in the power of the Holy Spirit in both directions. This conversation is key for us as we try to see the kingdom of God grow, especially in globally influencing multicultural cities like Toronto, where I serve.”

— **DR. JON THOMPSON**, Senior Pastor, Sanctus Church,
Canada and author of
*Convergence: Why Jesus needs to be more than our Lord and
Savior to thrive in a post Christian world.*

“Churches in the Global north are in a period of spiritual decline as believers get pulled into formal religion or abandon the faith all together. But Jervis Djokoto, a Canadian millennial pastor and Doctoral student of Ghanaian descent is out to change that. In a hope-filled compelling fashion, Djokoto’s *Re:New – A Case for Spiritual Renewal in the 21st Century Church* argues that the same experiential, Spirit-centered, communal and embodied movement of God that shifted the

center of Christianity to the global south is available to all countries and communities. Joel 2 speaks of the Holy Spirit being poured out on all flesh. That means in these last days there are renewal catalysts everywhere being moved by God to personal revitalization. Djokoto shares his personal story of transformation and then invites other change agents to join him in local networking hubs that prioritize spirituality over structures and have a willingness to wait as long as it takes for the Spirit to come. The result will be a creative contextualized gospel where Jesus the ultimate cure reverses the signs of sickness in our culture. Here is a clarion call to be taken very seriously.”

— **JAMES PENNER**, Lethbridge-based speaker, sociologist
and lead author of *Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When
Canadian Young Adults Are Leaving, Staying and Returning to
Church.*

“In his call for spiritual renewal, Pastor Jervis is not offering a new formula but instead is suggesting we slow down and pay attention to the work the Spirit has been doing all along. Jervis makes his point via a survey of church history, theology and global Christianity. Spiritual vitality has consistently emerged as God works through the church’s weakness and frailty. This book rings true because it emerges from the author’s own spiritual journey as he has learned to listen and discern the voice of the Spirit.”

— **REV. DAN SHEFFIELD**, pastor/church-planter, adjunct
lecturer at Tyndale Seminary and author of *The Multicultural
Leader.*

Introduction

Before we proceed with this entire case for Spiritual renewal, a few ideas must lead the way;

How to read this book

We will be embarking on a journey together, which, if God permits, could make a significant difference in your life and ministry —if you embrace the challenge it offers. Along the way, I share many stories, quote subject matter experts, show you statistics, quote scripture, recount my personal life story, give practical revitalization tips and use several illustrations to make my point. But it would be beneficial to you if you didn't miss the overall purpose of all these.

The ultimate goal of this work is *not* to present alarming statistics, discuss research, people, culture, ideas, or even to tell my story. Instead, this is a book about an almighty God. It is about the kind of spiritual transformation, revival and awakening that *only* God can and has initiated in the person of Christ Jesus. Yet, I employ many approaches to gradually invite you into this varied but beautiful world of spiritual renewal. Still, these approaches are merely instruments. They are the agents to lead you to a deeper appreciation of God's work in your life and ministry.

Moreover, since my audience is likely to be a combination of subject matter experts and those with virtually no knowledge about the topic, as Paul asserts, I hope to “be all things to all people” (1 Corinthians

9:19-23). But I hope this does not in any way divert your attention away from the ultimate purpose of this material. I want more than anything for you to see, know and experience God for yourself. And if this is your final take-away, I will be pleased.

Again, as you read this book, you will be invited on a journey with many turns. Like the varied landscape of scripture's genres, these turns combine narrative/story, poetry, prophecy, and history. In addition, I employ elements of church history, biblical theology, practical theology (the practice of ministry), the significance of global Pentecostal experience, Pneumatology with some personal story-telling. You will also find that, at times, I present statistical data from specific geographic areas like Canada, the United States, and Africa on the historical trends of spirituality and faith participation. On other occasions, rather than statistics, I tell stories, relate my experiences, and use analogies with concrete examples. Hence, in all, I serve you with a spice blend of sweet and sour—hard and soft data. But, in the end, the main question I seek to answer in this book is, "What is spiritual renewal and why is it needed today?" And I do this with scripture by my side and with my heart reaching out to God to speak and reveal Himself to you in a unique way.

Likewise, just as the resurrected Jesus reminds His travelling companions in Luke 24, the point of the Bible isn't the Bible. It's never ultimately about Moses, Abraham or David. The *end* of the Bible is to reveal Christ Jesus.

Similarly, the significance of the different methods I utilize are not the techniques themselves but the story they are telling. They are designed to speak, in different ways, about a story of God's transforming Grace in renewing and reviving all of His creation marred with sin. So then, the point of this book isn't this book. It is to introduce you to the God that has been shaping all history to move it towards *His* desired end—renewal. Again, if this is your final take-away, I will be pleased. For,

this will eventually issue in facilitating renewal for you and your entire community!

The ‘Whole’ Makes the ‘Parts’ Ring True

Additionally, as the first book in a series, every Part has a unique role in introducing you to the subject. For readers who ordinarily skim the first few pages of a book and move on to the next book, I’d like you to consider approaching this book differently. Ideally, reading the whole message will make each separate part ring more and more true. Therefore, before you skip pages, consider reading what each chapter is saying in this introduction to know what you may be missing.

Nevertheless, if you *can* only read a few chapters for some reason, you may want to consider reading Part Three instead. By then, I land on the practical next steps needed to bring renewal to your own life. That’s my end goal. So if time or circumstance limit your reading the entire book, at least read Part Three. Yet, without the previous parts, Part Three lacks the broader story that gives your practice the needed long-term foundations, orientation and support.

Secondly, no amount of research can turn a single word in this book into a life-giving substance for your edification—only the Holy Spirit can make that happen. Therefore, I ask that you pause, even now, to say a short prayer for the Holy Spirit to take all the multi-layered dimensions of this book to minister to you right where it is needed. I hope that the Spirit of God will be actively at work in your mind and heart, bringing transformation to you as you read.

About this book

As I've pointed out, this book is the first in The *Re:New* book series. The vision of this series is to provide biblical resources for ongoing spiritual renewal in today's Church. So, in the grand picture of things, this book sets the stage for the overall discussion on renewal. But, first, as a conversation starter, it presents initial issues and questions regarding the forthcoming discussion on the revitalization of the 21st century Church. As Book One of the series, I take the first step in a longer process of building a biblical paradigm, with on-the-ground evidence and recommendations, for the realization of spiritual renewal in the 21st century Church.

So, besides initially introducing you to the life story and events that have shaped this book, the principal questions I seek to address are; "What is spiritual renewal?", "What are some of the concrete evidence that it is indeed needed today?", "Are there any current trends or shifts in global Christianity that point to its presence or urgency?" and finally, "What do we do to become renewal catalysts actively fighting spiritual decay in any context we find ourselves?"

The core belief this first book expresses (and establishes for the rest of the series) is that the Holy Spirit is the primary catalyst for ongoing spiritual renewal—personally and corporately. So, from personal stories and experiences to global statistics and trends, I wrestle with the issue of church revitalization and the centrality of the Holy Spirit in facilitating it all.

To better understand spiritual renewal or appreciate the solutions it seeks to bring, we need to know the problems or the benefits for which it is necessitated. And this is what this first volume is all about. In the other books in the series, like my second book, *Re:Form, The Holy Spirit and The Revitalization of Christian Mission*, I make a broader case for an approach to Christian ministry that is Spirit-led, Spirit-filled,

Spirit-empowered, and socio-culturally engaged.

Book Chapters and Parts

This next section is to help you find your bearings as you read through this book. Here, I give a brief chapter-by-chapter overview of this book's contents, and a paragraph on who I hope picks up this book to read.

Part One: Setting the Stage

This book is divided into three main parts, each with three chapters. In *Part One*, I set the context upon which I stage the entire conversation in this book. First, I introduce the subject of renewal with a preamble. There, I present an initial description of renewal using the industrial revolution as a working example. The goal of the preamble is to establish the unique global terrain into which this discussion on renewal is set.

Part One then opens with three chapters; Chapter one, *Environments that have shaped this book's Contents*, Chapter two, *My Story: Preliminary Journeys in Renewal (Part 1)* and Chapter three, *My Story: Preliminary Journeys in Renewal (Part 2)*. If this book was an intricate jazz piece, then Part One is the melody line that helps you recognize and make sense of the entire composition. My encouragement is for you to listen carefully to that melody.

Here's what each chapter contains:

In Chapter one: *Environments that have Shaped the Contents of this book*, I discuss specific settings that have shaped my theological perspectives of renewal. This sets the stage for Chapters Two and Three, which go into even greater detail about my life story and how I came to write this book.

There, I describe how time, scripture, uncertainty, mentors, coming face-to-face with the Young Adult crises in Canada, my ‘Africanness,’ plus a life-long passion for spiritual renewal have all conspired to bring you the ideas and solutions I propose in this book.

Personally, I prefer to listen to a writer whose life story bears the marks of the story they tell. So, I’d prefer to take you on a journey to Ghana, West Africa, where I was raised, before moving to Canada, where I now live and serve. The goal is to enable you to see, acknowledge and honour the God behind the birth story of this book.

Part Two: Trends and Solutions

After the discussions in Part One have set the stage, Part Two quickly delves into spiritual renewal issues. Part Two also comprises three chapters. First, I discuss the meaning of spiritual renewal in Chapter four and then the significant Shifts in Global Christianity that make this conversation urgent today in Chapters four and five.

Here’s the breakdown:

In Chapter four: *What is Spiritual Renewal?* I define spiritual renewal. This is an important chapter. It serves as a working definition that will guide our overall discussion on renewal in this book. Later on, in other books in the series, this definition gets further expanded. Nonetheless, a starting definition here remains indispensable for our purposes in establishing the case for renewal.

In Chapter five: *Trends of Spiritual Renewal*, I discuss the famous ‘Pentecostalization’ of Global Christianity, and the shift in the center of Christianity from the West to the ‘rest.’ Making sense of these two major shifts in global Christianity builds a critical foundational case for the overall claim I make for renewal.

In Chapter six: *Trends of Spiritual Decline*, I shift the discussion from renewal trends in global Christianity, to trends of decline in our culture. In pitching renewal as a process of healing spiritual decay, I employ medical analogies in describing the sickness in the culture that requires cures. I describe renewal catalysts as doctors and Jesus as the ultimate panacea and doctor. I also describe the signs of sickness in our culture, focusing more on the trends of spiritual decline in Canada, and the process of identifying the reliable ways through which we could begin discerning and bringing solutions to such trends. Concerning establishing my case for renewal, chapter six is the crux of my argument in some ways. Yet, in other ways, the chapters in Part Three are crucial, as they tell you what you can begin to do about these trends.

Part Three: The Practicalities of Renewal

Part Three of this book focuses on the practical steps we can all begin to take in joining the action towards broad-scale renewal in Jesus' name. Again, this contains three chapters.

Chapter seven introduces you to *the Church's Unique Opportunity*. There, I discuss the critical identity markers that make the Church's presence and role in this new global terrain essential.

In Chapter eight, I attempt to answer the question, "Where Shall We Go From Here?" After presenting *Two Powerful Reasons to Hope: For the North American Church and any other Context Experiencing Spiritual Decline*, I suggest six practical actions you can take to find revitalization in your context. Finally, in *Chapter Nine, Where Shall we go from Here? —On Becoming a Renewal Catalyst (Part 2)*, I continue to answer the same question, "Where Shall We Go From Here?" There, I present five individual solutions and practices you can adopt to make your journey towards becoming a renewal catalyst in Jesus' name fruitful.

These last two chapters are significant conclusions to this book. As

my closing arguments, I suggest ways for you to maintain a rhythm of ongoing revitalization in your own life and ministry. I suggest forming or joining renewal hubs in your area, prioritizing spirituality alongside other structural issues in your Church and ministry, collaboration and partnerships between Churches and organizations, among other things. Finally, I suggest that ongoing renewal results from a Love-Choice, making room for Jesus, and periodically checking your spiritual temperature to see whether you are hot or cold. I conclude the book with a call to action that invites you to take a few more practical steps in helping push this discussion on church renewal forward.

Again, if this book was an intricate jazz piece, then Part Three is the Chord structure that helps you play along with the entire music. So my encouragement is for you to listen carefully to that Chord structure, pick up your instrument, and begin playing along.

Why I Wrote this book

In my experience, very few Christians have explored the dynamics of our spiritual life in a way that enables them to effectively utilize all the biblical tools for revitalization at their disposal. However, to remain spiritually alive in a world increasingly growing hostile to God, we need to learn and practice these biblical principles and utilize those tools.

Today, many sermons and workshops are available for Christians in many disciplines, ranging from leadership, administration, and coaching. Likewise, during my years of theological education, I have read many books and articles on various topics regarding Church-life, ministry life, missional engagement, and the systems and leadership models that should guide them. Yet, very few of them focused on the Holy Spirit's current role in all of that—or the underlining spiritual orientation that makes all our Christian work and witness powerful and effective. Still, spiritual vitality remains the living foundation that

holds all these, including our own lives, up. As a result, this book *and* my ongoing Doctoral work at Fuller Theological Seminary focus on exploring the Holy Spirit's work in the life and activity of the Church in the world.

So, for those who have never been taught cogently and systematically, what makes our Christian life stable, healthy and spiritually alive, I offer as a gift to you in this book series. I plan to provide you with biblical, pastoral, ecclesial, and missional contours to combat spiritual decay in your life and ministry.

Primarily, in this book series, I have sought to uncover what I consider reliable biblical and practical foundations for advancing the Spiritual vitality of the 21st century Church—and the effective missionary practice that should flow out of it. So, from this first book in the series to the very last, I aim to offer aspects of my learning over the past fifteen or so years as I have Pastored, led, questioned, studied, observed, prayed and sought answers to the nature of the spiritual life of the Church and the question of spiritual decline—in Ghana, Canada and other places.

The underlying probe is this; “What if God has something real, dependable and available for the Church as far as its revitalization is concerned?” So, I’m here to contribute my quota to this question by establishing a biblical case for spiritual renewal and suggesting ways that this could become a present and ongoing reality for you and your entire Christian community.

Thus, if you find something here that adds to your knowledge and practice of spiritual renewal, then my purpose in this study will have been fulfilled. I wrote this book, first of all, for Christians seeking to go deeper in their faith with Jesus. Therefore, I hope this book contributes to the study of spiritual renewal for personal, academic and training purposes.

More specifically, as I prayerfully considered the possibilities of launching a ministry directed at equipping and resourcing Christians

and their leaders in the practice of spiritual renewal, this book series was meant to be the working documents, clarifying our theology and practice of renewal.

Finally, even though I enthusiastically emphasize the work and influence of the Holy Spirit, I hope you come to appreciate very quickly that this material is not only meant for the denominationally Pentecostal or Charismatic Christian. Instead, it is written for Christians everywhere seeking to discover the biblical and practical foundations for advancing spiritual vitality in their lives and ministries. If this is your desire, this book is for you—whether you are a Catholic, Protestant, Methodist, from the Eastern or Oriental Orthodox Church, Presbyterian, or Mennonite. All in all, I pray this book serves you right where you are in your life, faith and ministry.

The Preamble

The Great Revolution

Our world has seen many revolutions. Some detrimental, some beneficial, others neutral.¹ Some have lasted many decades or centuries, others short-lived. However, in recent world history, the most widely impactful, as far as practical human life is concerned, is the industrial revolution. This began in the 1700s in Great Britain, followed by multiple waves of industrial-type inventions until the early 1900s.

It's easy to trace the ongoing impact of this revolution. Before this revolution, life on earth was quite simple, mostly agrarian. An agrarian society is simply an agricultural society or community whose economy is primarily based on producing and maintaining crops and farmland. After the revolution, factories and machines took over simple subsistence farming, and urbanization took on a new turn and increase. So, with the creation of the steam engine, the steam-powered locomotive, the telegraph, the telephone, the sewing machine, the incandescent light bulb, the airplane, and the first automobile—to name a few—the world became a different place. It became fast-paced, connected and far more sophisticated than it used to be a few thousand years prior.

This second millennium has also seen its fair share of revolutionary inventions. For example, on January 9, 2007, the world's first iPhone

was unveiled at the Macworld convention in San Francisco—this changed our world in tangible and powerful ways. Everything we want to see or know—good and bad— is now literally at our fingertips.

But underneath all these stories and discoveries in the past years lies an important detail. All revolutions have a unique character to them. Besides the fact that they radically impact multiple aspects of human life, they often begin in the hidden parts of the human mind and heart. Meaning, they start inward before they become evident outwardly. With sparks of insight and vision, the human mind receives impulses of change that first begin to renovate a person's thoughts, before practical machines or inventions are developed to improve human life—or solve a looming problem. Keep this pattern in mind: Revolutions start small, inside the human mind/heart, and then grow outward to impact others.

I want to begin our journey in this book with one such story. The story of a man, one I'm sure, is largely unknown. His name is Richard Trevithick. He is arguably one of the most important figures of the industrial age. Trevithick invented the very first steam-powered passenger vehicle on December 24, 1801.² Unlike the steam engine that had been pioneered by James Watt in the early 1700's, Trevithick's engines were extremely versatile: They could be put to work in mines, on farms, in factories, on ships, and in locomotives of all kinds.³

But Trevithick, the man behind this famous invention, has an unusual story. He seems to have had a not-so-glamorous life.

“Trevithick was born in 1771 in a mining village in Cornwall, England. He was a terrible student—his teachers thought he was a “disobedient, slow, obstinate, [and] spoiled boy,” who would never amount to anything, and in fact, he was basically illiterate his entire life—but he loved to tinker with tools and machines. In 1790, Trevithick went to work as a steam-engine repairman, first at the Wheal Treasury mine and then at the Ding Dong mine. In his off-

hours, he worked on an invention of his own: a steam locomotive that would be powerful enough to carry people and things, but compact enough to be practical.”⁴

The story goes that Trevithick died in poverty in 1833.⁵ But then, his inventions lived on, setting the pace for many other innovations that came to impact many people’s lives on earth.

So why begin a book on spiritual renewal with Trevithick’s story and the industrial revolution? The reason is simple. The story of spiritual renewal has a similar flavour. Out of the shades of darkness and nothingness, a powerful force emerges that changes everything about life on earth.

Like the story of Trevithick, the story of Jesus of Nazareth is a story with very humble beginnings and a not-so-glamorous ending. Jesus was born in a manger. And, after only thirty-three years, he was executed on a Greco-Roman cross. Born into the modest home of a carpenter and his espoused yet-pregnant-virgin girl, Jesus’ home-life was very ordinary (or so it seemed).

As the son of a carpenter, like Trevithick, Jesus’s life would have seemed to be one whose ultimate purpose was to simply ‘tinker with tools and machines,’ or instead, as a carpenter, with ‘wood and nails.’ But as it turns out, this wasn’t altogether untrue of the life purpose of Jesus. Indeed, the purpose of His life had to do with ‘wood and nails.’ Only this time, others nailed Him to a wooden cross. But out of the ashes of this shameful death or seeming public defeat, a remarkable and revolutionary victory over human sin and depravity was launched. The Bible tells us that Jesus’s death on the cross was God’s ultimate payment for our sin as humans. And so, from the mundaneness of a simple life in the desert spaces of Palestine, a world changer emerged. And the story of Jesus, the author of spiritual renewal and the ultimate saviour of the world, was born.

But what made the seemingly ordinary life of Jesus so extraordinary? The secret of Jesus' life goes deeper than outward material or physiological circumstances. As I mentioned earlier, revolutions often begin in the core of the human being, before it is launched to impact others. And so, out of the power of a clean heart and the influence of the Spirit of God, Jesus was first a victor in His own heart before He ascended the cross to become the saviour of the world. Before He was qualified to heal the ultimate diseases of the human spirit—sin, death and its Lord, Satan—in His own private life, He overcame all of these a thousand times. Again, remember: revolutions begin within before they are launched outward.

The most significant victories are first won in the human mind and heart, before they become visible. Similarly, the most profound defeats happen in the human spirit and mind, before translating into the brutality or evil that hurts others. Healing then must begin within our deepest parts before it is advanced or expressed externally. This is precisely what spiritual renewal does. It starts subtly within a human heart and then becomes a radical force that directs the entire direction of a person's life.

And as you will discover in this book, eventually, spiritual renewal impacts all aspects of society—even the entire cosmos. Yet it begins in the spirit, the inner person, of a human being when Jesus's own Spirit takes residence there. That unique renovation of the human soul is only the beginning of *the* greatest revolution. The reconstruction that true spiritual renewal launches transforms a person's inner life first, before making that person a unique transformer of other human lives.

Through Jesus' life and teaching, a broad-scale spiritual revolution was launched that would later become known globally as Christianity or the Christian movement. And today, there are millions of people who consider themselves Christians (or Christ-followers). Even though there are now many tributaries and distortions of that original wave of renewal that Jesus established, the movement's core values remain

unchanged, even after thousands of years. It is a divine renewal initiated and accomplished by God Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The miracle of the Jesus revolution is not in the number of followers Jesus now leads. It is in the very nature of the revolution He started—It is the transformation of the human heart. It is in the breaking forth of a pure heavenly vision of renewal out of the not-so-glamorous life of sinful humanity. 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV) says, “God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” All who put their faith in Jesus receive the beginning of a change with more profound benefits than anything any human being could invent.

Ordinary, Yet Revolutionary

Our world has seen many movements, but nothing like this one. This renewal is the manufacturer’s prescription for the damage caused *His* creation. It is the creator God healing our world from sin’s influence. This movement of renewal is the only one that dares to be ordinary and extraordinary at the same time.

The Bible is the only religious book that dares to paint its founder as not just a compelling miracle worker, but also very ordinary—one who was born in a manger, weeps, hungers, cares, and makes company with prostitutes and sinners. Rather than an exaggeration of Jesus’s life in pomp and pageantry, the picture the Bible paints is real, deep, compelling, divine, and life-changing—as its founder is still in many ways reachable.

Like Trevithick—whose ordinary life brought some unexpected benefits—Jesus was rejected, mocked, betrayed, beaten, and eventually murdered—all publicly. Yet the life Jesus lived, the simple stories and parables He shared, and the cross He willingly bore, set the pace for the greatest renovation—the renewal of the entire universe —starting with

the human heart. And the revolution He launched is still ongoing today, and invites many heirs and beneficiaries.

Radically, Jesus' legacy puts an axe to the root of our modern definitions of success by the way His simple and unsophisticated life has impacted the world. He demonstrated that God's ultimate definition of success and progress in life is not material progress, but the radical renewal of our soul. True human progress is in saving the mind, soul, and eventually the body. Not in the merely outward improvement of the human condition without the improvement of the inner human condition.

Jesus's life and ministry were God's version of the industrial revolution. Only, this revolution was launched in rather an unexpected and shocking way. It was divine—not metaphorically, but literally. It was God coming down to earth Himself, in the person of Christ, to live the life of a simple carpenter who dies on the cross for our sin, and is raised from the dead on the third day for our justification.

Today, Jesus's Spirit is in the business of repairing lives around the world. And now, a revolution of the will, mind and heart is taking place as millions of people bow to the name of Jesus, and find deep spiritual renewal in Him. The underlining challenge then is this: *any movement of human progress that does not first seek to apply Christ's healing balm to the human heart will not go far enough.* And this book aims to speak to and in line with the kind of gentle revolution Jesus launched. Like the industrial revolution, it is a call for a spiritual revolution that has a tangible impact on the world. But this change begins in the heart of a person as God forgives and cleanses us of sin.

If you own a car, ride a train, or even order an item produced in a factory, Trevithick and the industrial revolution have indirectly impacted your life. Yet, Jesus' revolution of love has exponentially more gifts to offer than the benefits of the industrial revolution.

For example, within what was noted as an “underdeveloped” Roman

economy with as low a life expectancy as between twenty-thirty, the Jesus movement was launched with power—restoring and healing many broken lives.⁶ The movement had so much meaning that a Roman Emperor, Julian the Apostate, writing to Arsacius, the pagan high Priest of Galatia in AD 362, said;

“For it is disgraceful that... the impious Galileans [Christians] support not only their own but ours as well, [and so] all men see that our people lack aid from us...”⁷

As Repud Das identifies in *Compassion and The Mission of God*, “It is apparent that by the fourth century AD, the charitable activities of the Christians were significant enough to come to the attention of the Roman Emperor.”⁸ This is what a true spiritual revolution does. It sends shock waves across all levels of society, even if so-called impious folks launched it.

Within the hierarchically structured Greco-Roman society, “any relief offered to the poor, [if ever,] was based on political status,” not the goodwill of the human heart.⁹ Hence, the sacrificial giving of the Christians within the colony was powerful and counter-cultural enough to arouse the investigation of the Roman Emperor.

Peter Brown, in his book *Poverty and Leadership in the Latter Roman Empire*, refers to the Christian movement in the Roman Empire (AD 300-600) “providing for the needs of the poor as a revolution that impacted the social imagination of the times.”¹⁰ Giving food to the poor may not seem like much in the grand scale of things—at least in most minds—but in the eyes of God, it does. Hence it is not uncommon for God to use the simple things of life to confound the wise things of the world (1 Corinthians 1:27).

So it doesn’t matter how small; God’s grace can transform it. It doesn’t matter how little; God can cause it to increase. And so, even amidst the

confusion of being marginalized, persecuted, or forgotten, God's gentle move amongst the early Christian family had the power to revolutionize the entire world. This is what spiritual renewal does and will continue to do.

It is noteworthy that in the same breath with which this Emperor Julian the Apostate refers to the followers of Jesus as "impious Galileans," he admits that the kind of revolution that these so-called "impious" folks advanced had more power than all their humanitarian efforts put together. Such is the power of true spiritual renewal. This is why a strong case for genuine renewal is critical today.

Something was different about these Galileans. That *something* was spiritual renewal. They had experienced the renovation of the heart that had a real impact on others—especially the poor and downtrodden.

The life of these Galileans offered aid that was not self-serving. It was selfless and ordinary, yet meaningful and unprecedented. It seemed that through the simplicity of selfless love towards others and their energetic love towards God, a powerful wind of change blew across the Mediterranean and beyond. And this wind was from heaven. It was gentle enough to ruffle the leaves of Emperor Julian, yet powerful enough to uproot the trees themselves—of sin and the flesh—changing many lives forever. It was untamable, annoying (to the Romans), and noble. And so, though they disagreed with the doctrine of these Galileans, and the Lord they proclaimed—Jesus—they could not deny the impact of their spiritual renewal and lifestyle on their surrounding culture.

Spiritual renewal is one of the most potent forces on earth. Hence, we need to rediscover the power of true spiritual renewal. In a seminal research report by Dr. Robert D. Woodberry, we are invited to see, in more concrete ways, the impact of the Christian movement on the social and political dimensions of life on earth.

Woodberry details the unexpected connection between the Christian

Protestant mission and the rise and spread of stable democracy around the world.¹¹ In his article, “The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy” published in the *American Political Science Review* in May 2012,¹² Woodberry argues that;

*“Conversionary Protestants were a crucial catalyst initiating the development and spread of religious liberty, mass education, mass printing, newspapers, voluntary organizations, and colonial reforms, thereby creating the conditions that made stable democracy more likely. Statistically, the historic prevalence of Protestant missionaries explains about half the variation in democracy in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania and removes the impact of most variables that dominate current statistical research about democracy. The association between Protestant missions and democracy is consistent in different continents and subsamples, and it is robust to more than 50 controls and to instrumental variable analyses.”*¹³

In a time when most social scientists tend to ignore religion (or Christianity) in the processes of modernization, this brilliant article was revolutionary. It was so game-changing that it won the American Political Science Association’s 2013 Luebbert Best Article Award, given for the best article in the field of comparative politics published in the previous two years.¹⁴ If Woodberry is correct, then the Christian movement hosts within it a power dynamic that has the potential to influence, positively and widely, all aspects of human life, even politics—if only the stewards of this will learn to be faithful hosts of their Lord’s renewing presence.

Here's the central point:

Like the industrial revolution, yet more powerful than it, spiritual renewal begins in the heart and grows gradually to impact the world. Many can relate to the story of Trevithick because perhaps, like him, they have failed at traditional schooling methods. Or have at some point in their lives been identified as “disobedient, slow, obstinate, [and] spoiled.” Yet Jesus invites us all, unsophisticated and ordinary, to experience profound spiritual renewal in His name.

And out of the simple things of your life and work: washing dishes, hanging out with friends, changing diapers, plumbing or repairing cars, God's vision for the renewal and renovation beckons and invites all and sundry into partnership with Him.

Trevithick worked as a steam-engine repairman, and “in his off-hours, he worked on an invention of his own: a steam locomotive that would be powerful enough to carry people and things but compact enough to be practical.” What divine vision has caught your heart's attention as you go about your everyday work? What are you working on in your off-hours? At this very moment, there is again a vision that is “powerful enough to carry people and things but compact enough to be practical.” This time that vehicle is not mechanical; it is *spiritual*. It is a force powerful enough to carry people yet compact enough to be practical. It is the spiritual renewal that Jesus launched. And the invitation is now open and urgent, perhaps more than it has ever been. And God invites us to join the rank and file of global renewal catalysts advancing the revolution Jesus began. Besides, the new post-COVID global terrain is, in many ways, calling for it. So, will you take some time to lean in, listen and join?

A New Global Terrain

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

— **John 16:33, NIV.**

The industrial revolution has since had many successors. And today, this conversation of renewal is set within an entirely new world. A world that, I think, is ripe and ready for change.

For those old enough to remember, doesn't it feel like just yesterday when the scare of the Y2K computer bug was the top story on the news? However, more than twenty years later, it almost sounds laughable that we thought a computer bug was going to bring the world to a standstill. Still, in some ways, this wasn't altogether an outrageous proposition. A year after the Y2K scene, the twin towers in New York were destroyed by planes hijacked by suicide bombers. The smoke and burning scenes of those world trade centres soon became iconic images of the global "war against terror" that led to several invasions and thousands of more deaths. And then, in 2020, a single virus, though not a computer bug, literally brought our world to a standstill.

This is not to fear monger, but for some, the thought of the world's bustling activities being halted by a virus or some 'alien' species, not to mention planes flying into two tall buildings, was only a fictitious scene from a Hollywood movie. But, at this time of writing this book, a pandemic bringing our world to a literal standstill is no longer a make-believe story in the cinemas. It is our current global reality. Though with varying levels of ramifications, everyone everywhere has been impacted one way or the other by these events. This, I think, is reasonable cause

for sober reflection. The quarantine measures may have offered us a pause, but we may need some helpful dialogue partners to deepen our reflection of what these events may be teaching us.

First of all, the crippling effects of the global pandemic re-emphasize a critical fact about life on earth. That is, no matter how advanced our scientific, technological, economic, or social platforms are, no one is altogether immune to trouble or pain in this world. In other words, none of our best attempts at progress—socio-economic, academic, technological, political, or other— makes us immune, in the long term, to hardship, pain and disaster.

So, without settling for a pessimistic outlook, the real question is whether we can somehow draw from sources of hope and build upon life-foundations that are unshakeable amidst unseen threats like this one. Meaning, we need better ways of describing human progress if we are to thrive in a world where evil and uncertainties exist. And if history has taught us a lesson, that new description of human progress should not be marked by material development or the absence of trouble or pain, but an unshakeable resolve inspired by the knowledge of the truth about what life on earth *really* is. This new idea of human progress should also be capable of redefining our ultimate pursuits in life.

As I write this, many small businesses have shut down, churches are closed, and malls are no longer bustling with shoppers. Additionally, with unemployment and death tolls on the rise and bad news after bad news on the TV, many continue to ask for reliable solutions to the increased levels of uncertainty this global pandemic has caused. Some also have, sadly, become chronic pessimists paralyzed by the fear of the unknown. And it is into this context of uncertainty that the message of renewal is calling forth its children.

In this charged social climate, it is no surprise that propaganda and conspiracy theories about the end of the world are also on the rise. And so are the many religious, freelance, and social propositions about what

we need to do now to prepare for that end, or how to solve our world's many problems if that end tarries.

The response to this mood is, however, mixed. Some swallow every piece of information they can get on YouTube that promises wisdom or hidden insight into some wholesale conspiracy. Others don't trust the news at all and are suspicious of every news media, especially those causing suspicion and fear. But the reality we all need to come to terms with quickly is that our world faces many problems, and COVID and its effects are just one of them. And even if by the time you're reading this, all the COVID lockdowns are no more and things have somehow changed, the lessons we are to draw from them have not.

In the past two years, the global scale of this pandemic has enabled many to pause and think more deeply about the real solutions beyond those for COVID that our world needs. So I invite you to do the same—to think hard and deeply. To begin to reflect again about the foundations upon which you should build your life moving forward.

Born into a Christian home in Ghana, and now as a Christian leader living in Canada, I have been a Bible-believing Christian almost all my life. And I'm convinced that the Christian worldview gives us *the* answers to our world's crying need. Jesus makes this plain, even for His disciples in John 16:33, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." In this current world marred by sin, we will have trouble. Jesus makes this clear. Yet, what our world needs is more than just another industrial revolution. Jesus offers us a unique solution, a refuge and hope. He says, "in me you may have peace." His offer of peace is founded upon a decisive victory in Jesus's future that had already been won in on our behalf. He appends, "I have overcome the world." That is quite a claim!

I have heard and read many stories about God, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, David, and others from the Bible. More than just Sunday school

stories, I believe these stories have something fresh to offer us today. Mainly, the story of Jesus does. If we want to find peace and victory amid today's confusion, we need to embrace Jesus's words anew.

I, too, received the punches that COVID threw at most of us. I momentarily lost the stability of a paying job and had to continue to trust God to sustain my family, surviving with a very minimal financial margin. I still am. Yet, again, as a Christian, the Bible has always been my starting point for discerning truth and finding hope amidst uncertainties like these.

And so, in the middle of this all, I had time to think and write. And in the pages of the Bible, I found what I needed. I discovered the hope to keep me going. And most of all, many of the ideas you are going to be reading about here in this book were framed during those gloomy months.

At the heart of it, I found a new language to describe our progress as humans. Rather than economic or technological categories, which are all essential and good, I found a renewed identity marker of success for the human experience. This is what I want to share with you. In place of other versions of progress, I want to propose *spiritual renewal*. Don't worry; along the way, I define what this phrase means. But rather than simply *telling* you what spiritual renewal is and why I think it is what we need, allow me to *show* you what renewal looks like.

As I guide you into a new world of renewal, I invite you to give me the opportunity to dialogue with your inner thoughts. I would love to show you around our world with new lenses. In my limited scope of your current reality, I hope you give me the privilege of showing you mine as God has shaped it to be. I want to show you the world as I currently see it and the passion that now leads my pursuits. And I hope that somehow, that vision for our world is even slightly compelling enough to begin to reshape your imagination.

I'm here to present a case for spiritual renewal, mainly focusing on

issues relating to the life and activity of the worldwide Church, but with huge ramifications for our world. But, again, as a Christian, my primary worldview is biblical. And I invite you into the worldview even if that's new for you. Besides, is this not a perfect moment for us to search deeper within ourselves to find and ask better questions when all we've relied on in the past seems to offer us little of the long-term security we've sought?

For our present world in need, ignoring hard questions about life after death, the purpose or meaning of life, the history and fate of our world, God, Jesus Christ, faith, the purpose and goal of politics, divine providence, or the Bible is no longer a show of wisdom. In my opinion, even for secular cultures around the world, these questions will soon become even more difficult and unreasonable to dismiss or suppress! I believe the answers that aren't subject to or undermined by our own or others' opinions are found within the pages of the Bible. And with critical new lenses, as we search therein, we will find the truth that genuinely anchors us when all else fails us.

So, as a starter, I want to leave you with two simple recommendations to begin your journey of spiritual renewal in this new world. These are the discovery of; (1) The Bible and Security of The Secret Plan; and (2) Honouring the Beautiful Invitation it offers.

The Bible and Security of The Secret Plan

This new global terrain calls for a new plan.

Again, due to the uncertainty of COVID numbers and trends, most of our plans are made 'in pencil.' With the lockdowns and restrictions periodically imposed over entire regions for public safety reasons, we are all careful not to make big plans too soon before they get squashed. Do you remember a moment during the pandemic when your plans had to be suddenly adjusted because of lockdown policies? Our anchor,

then, needs to be in a program that has never been etched in pencil. At a time like this, that's wise.

And there is a plan engraved in eternity, written in red, and sealed by the integrity of the one whose blood offered its ink. It is a plan the Christian God made before He created everything we see. It's a plan that holds the earth floating in space with no pillars or ropes holding it up. It is a plan God made without seeking our approval or our input. It is a plan which the Bible says in Ephesians 1:5 was fashioned after the good pleasure of *His* will, not ours. Yet designed to bring *us* to a remarkably good place, a new place, an expected end.

In a time when plans and events are shaken with uncertainty, we need to see this plan, know it, embrace it and live it out in its fullest measure. But as Paul says in Ephesians 1:9-10, this plan is also mysterious (or secret). It is hidden. It is concealed. Yet is found *in* Christ and revealed *by* the Holy Spirit.

So, to glance at that plan, we need a new starting point. We need to begin looking *upwards* and not *outwards* at everything else *but* the Bible's invitation to know, honour, and love God. It is a hidden plan only available to those whose hearts will be willing to take the risk at it. We have to seek God for it.

As Paul suggests in Ephesians 1:10, this plan brings unity to all things in heaven and earth under one Lord, Christ Jesus. This plan issues forth in cosmic renewal with Jesus as its head, ruling with power and glory. And though it may not seem like it now, that's a plan that ours cannot alter.

Though biblical prophecy is not always prediction, the final arrival of the Kingdom of God (upon Christ's second coming) is one of the aspects of biblical prophecy that is deterministic—meaning, it will surely come to pass. What happens between now and then is what is not totally known. So, for a plan we cannot keep fighting forever; we are better off investigating and joining in. If God has made good on all biblical

prophecy up until Christ's coming, He will surely make good on the remaining.

And if there is time for us to seek God's heart, His favour, His plan and His will, this is undoubtedly the time. As I've already established, we desperately need a reliable compass point that reorients our living in this world. And *the* plan I'm offering as the basis for our investigation and persuasion is the Christian God's plan of love and justice —revealed in scripture and embodied in the person of Christ.

For me, again, my starting place in discerning the times is not only the news; it is also on my knees with my Bible. And as I have read the Bible, I have come to appreciate that the Bible is more than just a collection of sixty-six books of poetry, history, and prophecy. Instead, it is a love letter from God to His beloved humans who always seem to forget Him. And more than ever, we all need to read that love letter, again, and thoroughly too. And when we do, we will find that the problems we face today, first of all, aren't new, and secondly, the solutions, too, aren't.

Over the past months and years, I have been secretly hoping that with the growing levels of uncertainty, the global Church community is slowly learning to depend more on the providence of their all-seeing God, rather than on their intricate plans. Christians are all being forced to pray more before we plan— a posture we should have had long before Covid-19 came. Yet, this time, a destructive virus is paradoxically our teacher too. And like Genesis 1:2, the chaos is the recipe for God to rise and call forth His light and order. In many ways, spiritual renewal is that new light we need amidst the chaos.

Today, Christians, and perhaps all people, are being reminded, by the unpredictability of the times, to seek God for *His* purposes, *His* plans, rather than blindly depending on our self-fabricated futures we often spin as God's. So, my favourite old verse from Proverbs 3:5-6 is here very appropriate:

Proverbs 3:5-6— NIV

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.

This text invites us *not* to lean not on our own interpretation and understanding on issues, but to commit all our ways to God, and He will direct us. So, each time a Christian conference, a Church service, or an event is cancelled or postponed due to lockdowns, the Church is again reminded that our programs and events may not be as important as we thought they were. Today, if there is one plan that should be at the forefront of our minds, it should be God's plan, not ours. Because often we have become too preoccupied with our activities that we are losing sight of why we are in this world. Every person has a unique purpose and assignment on earth given by God, and so does the entire Christian movement at this present moment.

The prayer on our hearts then should be, "Eternal God, what are you doing in our lives at this very moment? What are you seeking to do in the life of our communities?" And, "Father, show us how to join you in all that work you are already doing." If this becomes your genuine prayer each day, something will change inside of you. Everything about your life and what you live for will begin to shift.

Yet, even in this momentous time, unfortunately, many are still busy trying to fulfill their dreams and maintain their schedules, that they have little or no room to wait and seek God for His. But there is a lot at stake. This new plan beckons for a new generation of Christians who will take God at His Word, and be willing to step into His plan, no matter the cost.

Here's the primary conviction: our world was made for us by an intelligent and loving God who will never abandon His creation to

its ruinous fate. COVID has not changed God's Big Plan for you or His world. Though being outside the limitations of time and space, God abides, sees, and acts *in* time and space. And so, about 2000 years ago, when all seemed lost, God intervened. When Israel, God's people, were still unsure if God will honour His promise to come to be their salvation, God stepped in. Jesus, whom the Bible declares to be the one who heals and rescues all of the world was born. God's plan for renewing His entire earth was set in motion. God came, personally in Christ, to ensure that the sin, darkness, and gloom that often obscures His creation from seeing Him will be finally and permanently defeated. So, in His ascending the cross, He won the greatest victory. He defeated sin and the powers of darkness. And at His resurrection, His Godhood was confirmed. And on that faithful Sunday morning, God's plan for cosmic renewal was set into motion.

Clearly, the world around us doesn't seem yet to bear the full marks of Christ's sacrifice. A normal day on earth almost seems to discredit the verdict of the cross or the witness of the empty tomb. But the fact remains. The most significant victory has been won. And the powers that fuel all the wickedness, pain, tears and destruction in our world, and that cripple all of humanity have been defeated. Heaven and earth now have a new Lord—the Lord Jesus Christ. Who rose triumphant over death and bears perpetually in His hands and feet, scars as insignias of His divine victory. And as Lord over all, He gives Himself freely and beckons our trust and honour.

So here's the concluding point; in the eternity past, God framed a long-term plan for the overall good of His creation. This plan, as the Bible says, was somewhat hidden. Christ came to reveal it. And in the eternal future, that plan will be fulfilled in all its beauty. Yet in the in-between, the Church has been given a unique ministry—a ministry of reconciliation, to beckon others to be reconciled with God. And so today, all humanity needs, including the backsliding Church, is to

rediscover God's plan to renew His earth with the people who make up its cultures and nations.

The Beautiful Invitation—New Answers to Old Problems

This new global terrain calls not only for a new plan, but it also presents to us an enormous opportunity, an unusual invitation. It is an invitation to pause and find deep transformation in Christ. But are people and Christians responding to the wisdom the current time is screaming back at us? Unfortunately not. First of all, many Christians still aren't sure where to look for the long-term solutions our world needs. And Church leaders who should have a grasp on eternal and biblical truths are also cruising on hoping things get better without stopping to ask God *how* to move forward.

The year 2020-2021, with all its ills, was for many believers in Christ, including Church leaders, the years they discovered hidden fears and the idols that have often replaced God and His Word. Yet, with the stakes this high, the mere 'church-goers' kind of faith with no roots and foundations in biblical truth will no longer suffice! The cliché-kind-of-Christianity will no longer support the deep gulf and emptiness we all feel within.

So, in order to find this new way, the global Church needs to rethink how we *do* Church, and exist on earth as Christ's representatives. We need *new* answers to old problems. God wants to offer His Church new solutions to old problems. And we need hearts that aren't afraid to let go of any 'sacred cows' we may have held so tightly on.¹⁵ These may now stand as a stumbling block to what's *next* and *new*.

And to those who are listening and attentive, real change is in the air. The post-Covid Church will not be the same. And, for better or worse, the global scene of Christianity is about to change again, and we have to come to terms with it now. We all have the chance to act now. The

global Church needs to listen carefully and not act impulsively or cruise forward with old methods without *His* leadership.

Here's the invitation: I believe God is calling us all to *pause* and *listen*! Perhaps even to *Stop* in order to *hear Him*. Not to stop attending our Church community's meetings (whichever way that is—online, in-person etc.), practicing our faith or living out our worship of Him daily, but to *stop* searching for solutions everywhere except at the feet of the one who has one. If we stop and pay attention, we will not only hear His voice; we will also recognize that there are already growing spiritual renewal signs on the horizon. God's Spirit is working. He is stirring deep within many Christian hearts and motioning us corporately towards broad-scale spiritual renewal. When we pause, listen, and look around carefully, we will see that all is not dark and bleak. Some are doing things differently, asking the right questions, and seeking unshakeable sources of hope.

Some Christians are looking carefully at scripture, spending more time with God, praying more earnestly and seeking things *above* and not on the *earth* (Col. 3:1). As a result, a growing community of Christians are interceding in prayer more than they ever have before. They are seeking more of God's power, presence and for *His* heart. Some have willingly given up careers to seek God's leading on what's next. And the stage is being set for what may very well culminate into a global awakening. I hope it does.

At the onset of the pandemic, some formed prayer chains, and new Christian communities also emerged. And so, from this new global terrain, something beautiful is emerging. Like Sampson's riddle in Judges 14:14: "Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet." The pandemic has not destroyed the Church. It has instead strengthened it from within. Hence, while organized religion seemed to fall apart and be restricted on the outside, the inner life of the Church is gathering momentum and rallying support from heaven.

And it will soon launch out with glory and power in Jesus' name to turn all things right side up.

I have a deep sense that the winds of change and renewal are stirring even now as I write. But the outcome of events still lies within God Himself —and paradoxically also with us and how we respond to His call amidst it all. Thus, what are you going to do?

The proper/biblical response to these times lies somewhere in between *passivity* and shallow *activism*. What I mean is that it lies somewhere in-between merely hunkering down, hoping things change and moving forward with old methods without any serious biblical and prayerful consideration. This middle ground is a place of Godly contemplation and biblical renewal. That is a place where God stands, heals, and leads His submissive and Spirit-filled Church. This place also requires bold, dependent faith in God with lots of humility, long-suffering, prayer, scripture, risk, and perhaps persecution. Yet, in all, I believe the coming Church will overcome the idols that have held us back for decades, and that whole-scale renewal lies between our current *here* and the divinely planned *there* for the Church. It will, hence, be unreasonable for me to acknowledge all these and somehow withhold my pen or mouth from uttering the convictions that lay plain within my Bible and latent within my heart.

I'm passionate about spiritual renewal not because I see so many things wrong with our modern expressions of Christianity. But now, more than ever, I see that's the only way forward —not only for the world at large but especially for the Church. So, may the sleeping Church arise!

