

Charles Simeon

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[0 : 00] Well, it was advertised that Charles Simeon would be here, so it's a great disappointment that I wasn't able to bring him along, and I expect it's a disappointment for you all, but we shall do our best.

Let me first say a word of prayer. God, our Father, we ask for clarity of presentation. We ask for your Holy Spirit's presence, and we ask that we might all learn something from the experience of one of your great saints. In Jesus' name, amen.

Now, of course, you have all heard of Charles Simeon because you regularly read from the beginning of the Book of Common Prayer, and on page four you will see the mention, under the date of November the 13th, that it is the Black Letter Day for Charles Simeon of Cambridge, Pastor. For reasons that I cannot explain, the Book of Alternative Services tells us that the occasion should be November the 12th.

[1 : 19] So, if you look up on the internet, the feast day of Charles Simeon, according to the Church of Canada, it's celebrated on November the 12th.

But actually, he died on November the 13th, and the Book of Common Prayer seems to win again. Now, it's my thesis that Charles Simeon is vastly underestimated, not only in the Anglican Communion, but in the evangelical world, and in the Christian world in general.

And I propose to ask, at the end of this presentation, what you might think would be the reasons for the apparent neglect of Charles Simeon.

Now, of course, you may all know so much about Charles Simeon that this is a wrong assumption. So, am I making a wrong assumption here, that we are not terribly well informed about Charles Simeon, that we should be more informed about him?

There are some, some at least, who agree. So, I'll proceed on that assumption. Let me say that my sources are the very well-known little book by Handley Mole, Charles Simeon, Portrait, The Pastor of a Generation.

[2 : 54] There are some copies of this still available at the Regent College bookstore for those who are interested in a light and very wonderful reading.

It's not profound, but it is extremely exciting in many ways. For a little heavier reading, Mark Knoll has developed a series on the history of evangelicalism.

And the first volume in that series, Mark Knoll has written himself. It's called The Rise of Evangelicalism. And Charles Simeon plays a notable part in this book.

But more importantly, you get a sense of the context of the way in which evangelicalism, not only in the Church of England, not only in the Anglican Church, but also in the United States, and in a whole range of free churches, how that occurred.

And it's subtitled The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys. And I would have personally thought, and The Age of Simeon.

[4 : 09] But you see, I'm terribly, terribly biased here. I'll try and explain. I'll try and explain why. And then there's this very formidable-looking book, which is difficult to deal with because it has neither a top or a bottom.

But it's the memoirs of the life of the Reverend Charles Simeon. It's an 800-page read, and it consists of his writings and his letters.

It's written by William Karras, who was the vicar who took over from Charles Simeon in 1836. And so he fell into the hands of the...

He received all the memoirs and letters of Charles Simeon and has collected them. And this is an interesting source of information.

And I've already almost destroyed it by turning down the corners of the pages. Which my wife deplores. But it's the only way for me to find references.

[5 : 24] At a moment of notice. So those three are three very different sources. But I recommend everybody should actually read this one. The title of the talk is Charles Simeon, His Global Impact.

Those of you who have very good memories will recall that we talked about Charles Simeon once before. And the emphasis there was on his spectacular conversion.

And his early contributions. But it seems to me that in order to see the really extraordinary contribution of Charles Simeon, we need to look at the impact.

Not only during his life, but also after his death. So the structure of the talk is as follows. A look at the context of Charles Simeon's life.

First part. Secondly, the direct effects of his ministry during his lifetime. And thirdly, the indirect effects of his ministry after his death.

[6 : 39] The context of Charles Simeon's life, first of all. He lived from 1759 to 1836. So he was born in the year of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

When Quebec became part of Canada. Or rather, lower Canada became linked to upper Canada. And he died in 1836, four years after the great parliamentary reforms in Westminster.

So he covered a period of tumultuous and important political and economic activity in the United Kingdom. He was not unduly influenced by the dramatic events of that period.

He was single-minded in his focus on sharing the light of the Gospel. But there were, of course, major social issues with which he did become heavily involved.

Notably, the issue of slavery. In which he was closely connected with John Newton, with William Wilberforce. And all the great evangelical folks involved with getting rid of slavery.

[8 : 00] But whether or not he noticed it, he lived at a peculiarly fortunate time. In relation to the opening up of the processes of globalization. A theme which I want to emphasize in the second and third parts of the talk.

Let me first of all say about the context of Charles Simeon's life. That it was a low point in the history of the Church of England. It was a low point in the history of academia.

And specifically, a low point in the history of Eton College and King's College, Cambridge. Last week, David Lay informed us of the assumption that Europe is a Christian nation.

And talked to us about the limited nature of that assumption. There's a lot of hand-wringing about the fact that what was a Christian nation, a Christian continent, has become secularized.

But it's not all the case. It's not the case of a constant downward spiral. The spiral was down about as far as it could go at the time of Charles Simeon's birth and development.

[9 : 22] Let me just give you a few comments about the college into which he was graduated from Eton College to Cambridge.

According to the Charter of Foundation of that college, from 1441, there's provision for 70 scholars which were to be supplied by regular succession from Eton College.

The alumni of Eton College, at the expiration of three years from the day of their admission into King's College, were elected fellows of the college, whether or not they had passed the exams.

This incestuous practice has continued to this day, not exactly in that form, but the disregard by the college for the university's exams continues.

But at all events, the implications of the Charter are that about 20 new scholars should be admitted each academic year. In the year that Charles Simeon was admitted to the college, such was the state of Eton College, which is the only place from which it was appropriate to bring people, was that only three individuals were found to qualify.

[10 : 49] Indeed, in making a quick count of the 12 years on either side of the 1778 year in which he arrived, an average of only 4.2 individuals were admitted each year.

And the number actually ranged from 0 in one year to 9. So it was operating way below capacity. Provision for others was there, but no one came up as qualified. So I just mentioned that in passing because it indicates the level of activity and the level of qualification of the people involved around Charles Simeon.

And Charles himself was one of three individuals who were admitted. So here comes this young man. He's interested in horses.

He stables his horses at Newmarket, which is 25 kilometers to the east of Cambridge. He's well off. His father is a lawyer.

[11 : 56] Lives in Reading. And he has got used to being comfortable in his personal family life.

And it is a miracle that this man, out of this kind of corrupt and incestuous system, emerged as one of the great saints.

Not only was it a saving miracle that Charles enjoyed a soul of Tarsus-like conversion experience at the Easter Sunday Eucharist in 1779, but it's also extraordinary to recount that for the next three years after his conversion, he met no one who professed the same born-again experience.

And it wasn't for lack of trying to find kindred spirits. They simply were not around. Certainly not in that college and certainly not in the adjacent churches.

Circumstances of his appointment were curious. His father, who was a nominal Church of England member, was friendly with the Bishop of Ely.

[13 : 21] And the Bishop of Ely succeeded in making Charles Simeon's appointment at what is now called Holy Trinity Church. At the time it was just called Trinity Church.

And because it was done that way, from father to bishop, the church wardens were somewhat upset because they had their own favourite next candidate for the position.

The church wardens rapidly filled half the position. The position at Trinity Church was that of a living and a lectureship.

And the church wardens couldn't donate the living, but they donated the lectureship to a man called Mr. Hammond, who stayed there for ten years.

And Charles Simeon was only able to operate as the official vicar without access to the lectureship. Anyone with no independent means could not have accepted the position.

[14 : 32] It would have been impossible to survive on the salary of the living. The living meaning the position. So, it was not without controversy, but he was absolutely convinced that this was where God wanted him.

And as a result of the clarity of his vision and the perseverance, the help of parishioners, not the church committee or the wardens, but the regular congregation who rapidly grew under his ministry, he was most successful eventually, which I'm coming to.

But preaching in the period 1783 to 1790, he was really forced to look outside the church, the Holy Trinity Church, because it was so difficult.

And what he set up was a program of preaching in the churches around Cambridge, sort of a circuit of about 10-15 kilometers radius, and he would be preaching and lecturing regularly in those local churches.

I mention this because that particular practice had an extraordinary long-term impact. When I was at Cambridge, we were encouraged to indeed go and preach to these same churches around Cambridge, and I wasn't aware of the fact at the time, that was a somewhat direct influence carried over from 1783 to 1790, which influenced the practice of the local Christian student organization.

[16 : 23] But that's just a small point in passing. Finally, in 1790, Charles got the support of his church committee to initiate two evening lectures and additional services and even a series of lectures on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the evenings where the local working people were able to attend because, of course, they worked all day, every day of the week.

There were a number of interesting issues that arose during the time of this interim period for Charles Simeon, but by 1790, he was well established and the growth of the church was quite remarkable.

So let me then turn to the second part. There's lots more to be said, of course, about that, which I think we said last time and I'm sure you'll all remember from the last time exactly what those details were.

So the second part is the direct effects of Charles Simeon's ministry. First of all, the appointment of evangelical clergy. By the time of Simeon's death in 1836, after serving as the incumbent of Trinity Church for 54 years, it is estimated that there were 1,100 clergymen throughout the United Kingdom who had learned the power of the gospel from Charles Simeon's preaching and pastoral care.

Can I say that again? 1,100 clergymen throughout the United Kingdom who had been influenced by the gospel as preached by Charles Simeon.

[18 : 21] Whereas in 1784, for example, Simeon reported to John Wesley that there were only three parish churches in Cambridge wherein the scriptural religion is now being preached, by the end of his life, every parish church in the city had an evangelical ministry.

Secondly, into this direct effect of Charles Simeon's ministry, he published a commentary on the Bible, set up the Simeon Trust, published hundreds of sermons and outlines of sermons called Sermon Skeletons, carried these skeletons around, with him, apparently.

These are still in print. His chief work is a commentary on the whole Bible entitled Horei Homilecticae, which I haven't read.

And in this context, the Simeon Trust was established by him for the purpose of acquiring church patronage to perpetuate evangelical clergy in the Church of England parishes.

It continues to operate to this day. Those of us who support Artizo will recognize that funding from the Simeon Trust continues to be made available.

[19 : 51] So there's a continuing impact of Charles Simeon through that Simeon Trust to this very day. Thirdly, innovation in missionary activity.

In the 18th century, there was no missionary activity associated with the Church of England. And Charles Simeon sits right at the beginning of this new missionary movement.

He worked with William Wilberforce directly to drum up support for missionary work in India.

Lord Cornwallis, who was the Governor General of India at the time, was not enthusiastic but promised not to stand in the way of missionary work.

And in 1799, the Church Missionary Society was born. At the meeting at which the Church Missionary Society was formed, it is noted that the Reverend Charles Simeon, with characteristic distinctness of purpose and promptitude of zeal, proposed three questions.

[21 : 14] What can we do? What shall we do? And how shall we do it? For the purpose of instituting a society amongst the members of the established Church for sending missionaries among the heathen, God be merciful unto us and bless us, cause his face to shine upon us, so that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations.

That's a quote which was incorporated into the motion for the establishing of that Church Missionary Society. Thereafter, a series of student encounters, a series of very distinguished people who subsequently became missionaries in India and elsewhere, were coached by Charles Simeon in his rooms at the college.

one famous individual whose name you may well be familiar with, Thomas Thomason, came up to the university in 1792, this was before the founding of Church Missionary Society, but he immediately joined Charles Simeon's evening lecture class in the college, even though he was from a different college at Cambridge.

In 1794, Charles asked Thomas Thomason to become his assistant, and he and Charles and Anne Thomas together ministered to a number of the adjacent churches, particularly in a place called Stapleford, outside Cambridge again.

In 1800, Henry Martin, a student at St. John's College, started to attend Trinity Church and was profoundly influenced by Charles Simeon.

[23 : 21] Charles Simeon thought of Henry Martin as his son. Charles Simeon, by the way, was never married. He remained a fellow of the college in a monastic type situation, living in the Gibbs building, which is a large structure next to the college chapel.

And really, progressively, over time, Charles Simeon accumulated a whole raft of sons in the faith. And this example of Henry Martin is of great interest to those of you who know Cambridge, because the continuing influence of Henry Martin is memorialized in what's called the Henry Martin Hall, which is a place of prayer, immediately adjacent to the Holy Trinity Church, as it now is.

Well, there's a whole list of individuals that one can follow through. We don't have time this morning to go through those individuals, but I mention Henry Martin because he's the outstanding example from that whole group.

I guess I have about a dozen names here which I won't bore you with. A third emphasis which has had some significant impact was Charles Simeon's interest in mission to the Jews.

He established the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews, now known as the Church's Ministry Among Jewish People, or CMJ.

[25 : 06] the comment by the Reverend Carus, this gentleman who wrote this book, was that Mr. Simeon was preeminently attached to this society.

He dictated his final sermon from his deathbed on the importance of the conversion of the Jews. So that was another distinctive feature. As a brief aside, I had originally advertised this talk as the global impact of a man who never left the UK.

And this, of course, turns out to have been a mistake. So I'm glad that our coordinator eliminated the last part of the title, because in the context of looking at this question of promoting Christianity amongst the Jews, he did actually travel to Amsterdam in 1818 and also to Paris in 1823, where there was a growing interest in that whole matter.

Further, the British and Foreign Bible Society was established in 1804 at Cambridge with some financial support from Simeon.

He was a strong supporter of the prayer book and homily society. And according to the historian Thomas Macaulay, Simeon's authority and influence extended from Cambridge to the most remote corners of England.

[26 : 44] His real sway in the church was far greater than that of any primate. his memorial in Holy Trinity Church, which is written up in such fine letters that I can't read it, in memory of the Reverend Charles Simeon, M.A., Senior Fellow of King's College and 54 years Vicar of this parish, who, whether as the ground of his hopes or as the subject of all his ministrations, determined to know nothing but Jesus Christ and him crucified, 1 Corinthians 2.2.

And you will see that prominently displayed in the vestibule at Holy Trinity Church to this day. And it's an inspiration to this day.

Before talking about the indirect effects of his ministry, let me just say a few things about the character of Charles Simeon.

I don't suppose all of you were at the 7.30 service this morning, but we've heard a very fine sermon from Aaron Roberts on Ezekiel 28, which I won't ask you to quote from memory.

But the theme of the sermon was the sin of pride of the city of Tyre and the judgment of God on that city.

[28 : 20] Charles Simeon fought against the sin of pride constantly during his life. He spent hours in prayer, worried about the fact that he was too proud.

he was going to do it. It's quite understandable, I think, if you come up to Eton College as the sort of center of British establishment, and you join a group, only two other people in this group going into the college at King's, after three years you automatically graduate into a fellowship, irrespective of your examination results, it's easy to see how he could have got into the sense of pride in his own achievements.

Such was the drastic nature and dramatic nature of his conversion that his whole sense of pride was challenged and briefly overcome completely, but it kept coming back and hitting him all the time.

He has a marvelous little passage in the Carist book, which talks about the secret of success in preaching. He says there are three things that one has to remember.

Humility is one, humility is number two, and humility is number three. And this seems to have been one of the excellent inspirations and guiding lights for him.

[30 : 05] So the direct effects of his ministry were really, I think, related to his sense of humility and his sense of the singleness of purpose that God had given him in this posture.

it. There's one other thing before going to the indirect effects and the global impact, which is what I'm supposed to be talking about. The importance of the prayer life of Charles Simeon.

He used to get up at four o'clock in the morning and prayed for four hours. I don't know if we have any competitor in the room.

But you say, well, of course, he was a privileged person and didn't have anything to do. But actually, he had a lot to do. And he ran a lot of study groups and a lot of pastoral care.

was administered from his rooms in the college. So let me just move on to the third and sort of major point of this talk, the indirect effects of his ministry following his death.

[31 : 31] And this relates to my earlier comment about the timing of his ministry and the globalization globalization that was really taking off at this point.

The coincidence of the rapid growth of the British Empire during the same period as Simeon's ministry meant that his influence became automatically global.

skeptics have commented on this to say that of course the Christian gospel was imposed on the backs of the trade routes and there is a sense in which of course that was true.

But there had to be a sense of strategy amongst the Christian community in order to take advantage of this particularly advantageous situation.

The appointment of Charles Simeon in 1783 to the ministry of Holy Trinity Church is according to Wolfe Wolfe being the author of the second volume in the series of the history of evangelicalism it marks the dawn of evangelical religion in Cambridge.

[32 : 55] While Milner had been instrumental in making a university education possible at last for avowed evangelicals Milner being the president of Queen's College Simeon discharged with a wonderful combination of wisdom and spirituality the no less important function of their religious instruction.

But we need to speak more generally about Charles Simeon's indirect influence on 19th and 20th century societies.

The lessons that I would take from this experience of Charles Simeon's is that of the combination of strategy and of dedicated discipleship.

The combination of the two are supremely displayed in the way in which he took advantage of the advantages that he had been given from family and from the context at the same time working very systematically and with a great deal of dedication in his preaching and pastoral work.

Both at Holy Trinity Church in the city and in his rooms in Gibbs building at the college he was located strategically in relation to direct contact with individual students who had important connections in the world of trade and commerce in the world of governance and of diplomacy.

[34 : 48] Some had great academic skills and furthered Simeon's influence in their world of scholarship but the great majority were involved in the furtherance of the British Empire and they did indeed sit on the coattails of its expansion.

Some became missionaries themselves and furthered Simeon's influence at the level of church planting but the fact is that every graduate of Oxbridge at that time occupied a privileged position in Britain and in the unfolding empire.

so there was a regular invitation put out to all the students in the college as well as to members of the parish of Holy Trinity Church to meet with him in the college on a weekly basis and after a while the amount of personal ministry that occurred in two of the rooms he occupied one room for 30 years in the college and then following that he occupied another room upstairs the top of Gibbs building for 24 years these were known as the saints rest amongst the rest of the college that was partly in jest partly cynicism but also in fact a correct description of what went on on the third floor of Gibbs building it was in these rooms that

Simeon inspired many of his followers although of course initially many of them would have come to know Christ in the Holy Trinity Church but many of them were essentially evangelized as a result of the ministry in the college rooms now the precise connections between Simeon and subsequent generations does not seem to have been researched as thoroughly as one would hope this may just be a comment on myself that I have not researched the connections carefully enough myself but I've looked and it seems to me that there are a lot of connections and they need to be tied up more closely he inspired generations of university students says

John Wolfe Alexander Stewart who was a leader in the Perthshire Scotland revival of the 1790s says that Charles Simeon was a man sent from God to me who preached in my church and left a savor of the things of God which has remained with us ever since it was not a straightforward situation the evangelical point of view was never popular public opinion sometimes described those who worshipped in Holy Trinity Church as having left common sense discretion and sobriety and similar opposition and cynicism met the sons of

[39 : 01] Simeon's ministry as they worked in broader context but let me then just say the following the church missionary society which was the society for missions to Africa and the east started off with this African and Indian emphasis but proceeded to influence Australia New Zealand Ceylon and Bombay and the West Indies the shores of the Mediterranean even the wild Indian in Northwest America now known as Canada on to Japan and at length to the countless millions in China the church missionary society which he was not the only initiator of of course but has attracted over 9,000 men and women to serve as mission partners during its 215 year history so again it's one thing to see this as a general effect of

Charles Simeon's work it's not only Charles Simeon's work but it's extremely important because of the strategic position that he occupied and the number of individuals who he actually pastored and that's the connection that hasn't been explored as well as one would hope a similar link has been traced to the emergence of the Cambridge Intercollegiate Christian Union as you know kick you for short thank you which was the foundation of InterVarsity there appears to be a series of links here

the Cambridge University Prayer Union which was established in 1848 ten years later the Church Missionary Union was founded and the years 1860 to 1880 were years marked by great religious activity among evangelicals throughout

England this period saw the origination of the Keswick Convention the China Inland Mission the Young Men's Christian Association the Children's Special Service Mission the Scripture Union the Church Army and many other similar societies but the origins of the Kikyu were traced to the joint influence of the Church Missionary Union and the Daily Prayer Meeting and the annual evangelistic mission for undergraduates so following a conference in 1877 the Kikyu came into existence and this was the first University Christian Union and is the University of Cambridge's most prominent student Christian organisation even at the present time now there's a big jump between Simeon's death in 1836 and the foundation of the Kikyu in 1877 and it's this series of linkages which I think needs to be established more clearly there's an even further jump to the so-called Cambridge Seven in 1885 which is an important link between Simeon and a group of well-connected graduates who all went into the mission field in the same year these seven individuals decided to become missionaries in China and were scheduled to leave for China in early February of 1885 but before leaving the seven held a farewell tour to spread the message across the country and it was during this tour that someone dubbed them the Cambridge Seven all seven had become Christians at Cambridge as students and were moved by their beliefs to go to China to spread these beliefs to help the local population most remained in or connected to missionary work for the rest of their lives the conversion an example of the seven was one of the grand gestures of 19th century mission which made them into something like religious celebrities they helped catapult the

China inland mission from obscurity to almost embarrassing prominence and their work helped to inspire many recruits for the mission and other mission societies in 1885 when the seven first arrived in China the mission had 163 missionaries and this had doubled by 1890 and reached some 800 by 1900 which represented one third of the entire Protestant missionary force the biographies of these seven individuals are fascinating every one of them had a major influence upon the emergence of Christianity in China and if we are to believe the data coming out of China there is then this enormous growth most recently estimated about 100 million Christians in China so there's been a significant gap in the history the linkages have not really been entirely well connected but in my reading and again

[45 : 12] I'm open to challenge on this but in my reading it seems to me that Charles Simeon represents a most extraordinary important position in this chain of events out of the dust of an irreligious society came this light of the gospel and a very remarkable series of impacts and it's a global impact I believe and again I would admit of course to any discussant that part of this was brought on by the nature of the secular trade and the secular political context but it would not have occurred it seems to me without the Holy Spirit breaking into the life of an individual in a most extraordinary way in a most unlikely place and giving us the sense of the priority of the gospel for the next 200 years so I want to open this for discussion with respect to the question why has this man been so neglected by the

Church of England and its Anglican counterparts that's us I guess and there are literally shelves of books that I'm sure you know on Wilberforce on Newton on Edwards on the Wesleys on Whitefield on Carey and Hudson Taylor the number of books on Charles Simon seems to be relatively small I'd like to suggest a number of directions in which one might carry out the discussion though of course I'm in your hands as to which direction you'd like to take the discussion but is it something about our evangelical tradition that it only celebrates heroes who have traveled far and preached outside their own local church is it something about our tradition that we create idols out of people who speak a lot or write a lot

I mean Charles Simon did write a lot but not famous books what is the criterion by which we elevate someone to the position of a saint in our tradition well we know we are all saints in God's sight but we've got a black letter day for this man somehow or other how do we evaluate work for the kingdom in our tradition now my whole question collapses if you think that Charles Simon has been lauded enough and by getting a black letter day that he's achieved the greatest eminence as possible in our community but I suspect that we could do a better job of recognizing a man who had a tremendously remarkable soul of

Tarsus type conversion experience and who fought against his own weaknesses he gave sacrificially again one might say well he had the money but he gave sacrificially not just to setting up the Simeon Trust but each of these societies which I mentioned he contributed to he had a system of penalizing himself whenever he found the sin of pride was getting the better of him put money into a savings account which he then contributed to any one of the societies as an example of his dedication so what I'm moving towards is the sense of really the gentleness of this evangelical ministry and the comprehensiveness of it that it was of course it was magnificent preaching wouldn't have been effective without the magnificent preaching there was also this extraordinary pastoral dimension which was a 24-7 type occupation for him and again we can say well he was not married and he was living a monastic life and so on all those are correct comments but lots of people don't take advantage of the freedom that they have to do what they should do it seems that he was quite extraordinarily dedicated and that that dedication has been honoured by this global impact that I'm suggesting thank you for being good and I so you can