

# Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 17, Urban Growth and the Churches Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

## 1. Abstract of Green, American Christianity, Session 17, Urban Growth and the Churches, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Roger Green's lecture explores the impact of urban growth and industrialization on American churches, particularly Protestant denominations. It examines how churches responded to the challenges of increased populations, economic disparities, and social issues like long working hours and low wages. **The lecture identifies five key responses, including the exodus of some churches from cities, the struggles of those remaining without resources, the rise of influential urban churches, the development of new outreach strategies by groups like the Sunday School Union and the YMCA, and a fundamental theological shift.** This shift led to what would be known as the social gospel and a broader re-evaluation of traditional Protestant authority in light of modern thought. **The lecture then introduces "liberal theology" as a significant theological development of this period, characterized by a move away from strict scriptural authority and an accommodation to modern ideas in seminaries, pulpits, and publications, setting the stage for future discussions on fundamentalism and neo-orthodoxy as counter-movements.**

**2. 14 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Green, American Christianity, Session 17 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Church History → American Christianity).**



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### 3. Briefing Document: Green, Session 17, Urban Growth and the Churches

#### Briefing Document: Urban Growth, Church Responses, and the Rise of Liberal Theology in American Christianity

**Overview:** This briefing document summarizes the main points discussed by Dr. Roger Green in Session 17 of his American Christianity lecture series, focusing on the impact of urban growth and industrialization on American churches and the subsequent responses. It also introduces the initial concepts for Session 14, which marks a transition to "Modern America" and the emergence of liberal theology.

#### Session 17: Urban Growth and the Churches

This session examines the dramatic changes brought about by industrialization and urbanization in America and how the church, particularly Protestant denominations, grappled with these shifts.

#### Main Themes and Important Ideas:

##### 1. The Impact of Industrialization and Urban Growth:

- Dramatic societal changes included population increase, territorial expansion, and increased economic activity.
- The factory age brought significant problems:
- **Long working hours:** 14-16 hours a day, seven days a week in poor conditions.
- **Low wages:** Approximately \$1 a day until 1835, necessitating entire families working.
- **Extreme wealth disparity:** A significant gap between the very rich and the very poor. As Green notes, "the division between the extremely wealthy and the very poor was pretty massive."
- Urban life contrasted sharply, as illustrated by the Lower East Side Tenement Museum versus the Newport mansions, the latter being "summer homes only" for the wealthy.

## 1. Consequences of Urban Change for Churches:

- **Changes in Protestant Population:** An "ever-increasing number of Protestants...strayed away from the church," finding it irrelevant or becoming antagonistic towards it.
- **Changes in Roman Catholic and Immigrant Populations:** These groups "stayed connected to their churches" as they found "a family home in sometimes a hostile environment." Their churches and synagogues served as a "place of refuge."
- **Growing Gap within the Church:** Churches, especially Protestant ones, struggled to minister effectively to the urban population, leading to a "pretty serious gap between people in the church."

## 1. Responses of the Church to Urban Growth and Industrialization: Dr. Green outlines five major responses, primarily focusing on Protestant churches:

- **Exodus from the City:** Many churches with resources chose to "leave the cities and get out of the cities" as they felt unable to cope with urban problems. This created both geographical and "morally remote" distance from the issues. While not peaking until the rise of suburbia, this trend began earlier.
- **Struggle for Survival in the City:** Some Protestant congregations lacked the means to leave and "struggle[d] to survive" in the city. They often became isolated, creating their "own small world that was remote from the world right outside the church door" and lacking the means or vision to minister to their surrounding communities. Green shared a personal anecdote illustrating the "sad state" of such churches.
- **Large and Influential City Churches:** Wealthy Protestant churches with charismatic preachers built "magnificent churches" within the city. Examples include Trinity Episcopal Church in Boston (built by Philip Brooks) and Riverside Church in New York (funded by the Rockefellers). These churches often appealed to the wealthy and influential, including "the cultured despisers of religion." However, a potential problem was the "accommodation of the biblical message to the wealthy," sometimes watering down messages about sin, judgment, and hell.
- **New Strategies and Organizations:** Recognizing the need for innovative approaches, several groups emerged to minister to urban populations:

- **American Sunday School Union (founded 1824):** Focused on education (literacy to read scriptures) and biblical knowledge, leading to a "very literate laity." This was a "new thing" reaching out to meet educational needs.
- **YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association):** Founded as an "evangelical movement" to minister holistically (spiritually, educationally, socially, physically) to young men in cities.
- **Salvation Army (founded 1865 in England, 1880 in America):** Ministered to the inner-city poor by "moving in with people," addressing both physical and spiritual needs. Their philosophy was that "unless you minister to them spiritually as well as materially that you're recognizing their holistic, their personhood."
- **Non-Denominational Revivalism (Finney, Moody):** The "camp meeting come to the city" saw a tremendous response in urban settings, surprisingly so for both Finney and Moody. Culturally, this movement:
  - "penetrated the anonymity" of city life, offering community.
  - "broke up the monotony of urban living," providing excitement.
  - offered a "substitute for the theater" as a healthy form of entertainment.
- 1. **Theological Response: Radical Re-understanding of the Gospel:** The fifth response was a "radical re-understanding of the gospel," a "theological response" aiming to "meet urban life head on for the sake of the gospel." This involved "developing a new theology," sometimes referred to as the "social gospel." Dr. Green notes that the class will discuss this in more detail later and mentions the reading of the Rauschenbusch biography, a key figure in the social gospel movement.

## **Session 14: Liberal Theology in America (Introduction)**

This session marks a shift to "Modern America" (1918-present in the syllabus, though the content discussed is pre-WWI). The introduction focuses on the rise of liberal theology.

### **Main Themes and Important Ideas:**

1. **Context of Change and Confidence:** The period between the Civil War and World War I was marked by "great changes in American cultural and social life" and a widespread confidence and "progressive" outlook on the future.

2. **Theological Shift: The Nature of Authority:** A major theological change was a challenge to the traditional Protestant understanding of authority.
  - Traditional authority rested on "the scriptures and upon the scriptures revealing God in Christ to us."
  - This authority was increasingly challenged by "Darwinism," the "value of science," and the "value of social change over the authority of the scriptures."
  - Darwinism presented a "creation from below" contrasting with traditional views.
  - This challenge led to Protestants "beginning to understand the Bible in new and different ways" and the emergence of "classical Protestant liberalism."
1. **Impact Through Key Institutions:** Liberal theology gained influence through three major channels:
  - **Leading Protestant Seminaries:** Many major seminaries were "affected by classical Protestant liberalism," influencing future preachers.
  - **Major Pulpits:** Some prominent churches were led by "classical Protestant liberal preachers."
  - **Leading Publications:** Publications like "The Christian Century" (founded with the optimistic belief that the 20th century would be the "Christian century") promoted liberal theological ideas.
1. **Two Characteristics of Classical Protestant Liberalism:** Dr. Green uses the metaphor of a coin with two inseparable sides:
  - **Freedom from Tradition:** A desire to break free from what was perceived as an "oppressive" church tradition, including the authority of scripture.
  - **Adjustment to the Modern World:** An attempt to adapt the "biblical message to the modern world" to make it appealing to contemporary audiences.
1. **Pushback to Liberal Theology:** Dr. Green introduces two significant movements that arose in response to classical Protestant liberalism:
  - **Fundamentalism:** A primarily Protestant movement that strongly opposed liberal theology.
  - **Neo-Orthodoxy:** A later movement that, like Fundamentalism, took the Bible seriously but interpreted it through the lens of the Reformers, particularly John Calvin.

1. **Strategies of Classical Protestant Liberalism:** The next lecture will explore "three theological kinds of strategies by which they are going to try to save American Christianity," based on the conviction that Christianity was "in trouble."

#### Quotes:

- "the division between the extremely wealthy and the very poor was pretty massive."
- "summer homes only." (regarding the Newport mansions)
- "ever-increasing numbers of Protestants...strayed away from the church"
- "a family home in sometimes a hostile environment." (regarding Roman Catholic and immigrant churches)
- "place of refuge." (regarding churches and synagogues for immigrant groups)
- "pretty serious gap between people in the church."
- "leave the cities and get out of the cities"
- "morally remote"
- "own small world that was remote from the world right outside the church door"
- "sad state" (of struggling inner-city churches)
- "magnificent churches"
- "the cultured despisers of religion"
- "accommodation of the biblical message to the wealthy"
- "unless you minister to them spiritually as well as materially that you're recognizing their holistic, their personhood." (Salvation Army philosophy)
- "camp meeting come to the city"
- "penetrated the anonymity"
- "broke up the monotony of urban living"
- "substitute for the theater"
- "radical re-understanding of the gospel"
- "developing a new theology"

- "the scriptures and upon the scriptures revealing God in Christ to us."
- "Darwinism...creation from below"
- "The Christian Century"
- "Freedom from tradition."
- "Adjustment to the modern world."
- "three theological kinds of strategies by which they are going to try to save American Christianity"

**Conclusion:**

Session 17 provides a crucial understanding of how significant societal shifts in the industrial and urban eras presented major challenges and opportunities for American churches. The diverse responses, ranging from retreat to innovative outreach and theological re-evaluation, laid the groundwork for the theological debates that would define the subsequent period. Session 14 introduces the rise of liberal theology as a key development in this evolving landscape, setting the stage for understanding the internal struggles and transformations within American Christianity in the modern era.

## **4. Study Guide: Green, American Christianity, Session 17, Urban Growth and the Churches**

### **American Christianity: Urban Growth and Liberal Theology**

#### **Quiz**

1. Describe two significant problems that arose during the industrial age in America that the church had to confront.
2. Explain why Roman Catholic and other immigrant churches often had an easier time retaining their congregations during urbanization compared to Protestant churches.
3. What were two key characteristics of Protestant churches that chose to leave the city in response to urban growth and industrialization?
4. Describe the state of Protestant churches that remained in the city but lacked the resources to thrive. What were some of their limitations?
5. What was the general characteristic of the large, wealthy Protestant churches that remained in urban centers, and what potential problem did they face in their ministry?
6. Name two of the four new strategies or organizations that Protestant groups developed to reach people in urban environments. Briefly explain their approach.
7. Identify two cultural reasons why non-denominational revivalism was successful in American cities during this period.
8. What was the fifth major response of the churches to urban growth and industrialization, and what term is often associated with this response?
9. What significant shift in the understanding of authority occurred within Protestant churches during the period leading up to World War I, and what factors contributed to this shift?
10. According to the lecture, what were the three key types of institutions where classical Protestant liberalism gained influence and why was this significant?

#### **Answer Key**

1. The industrial age brought about long working hours (14-16 hours a day, seven days a week in poor conditions) and low wages (around a dollar a day until 1835),



forcing entire families to work. Additionally, a significant division emerged between the extremely wealthy and the very poor, creating social and economic disparities.

2. Roman Catholic and other immigrant churches provided a sense of community and belonging for their members in a sometimes hostile urban environment. These churches served as a "family home" and a place of refuge, fostering strong connections and loyalty among their congregations.
3. Protestant churches that left the cities became geographically remote from the problems of urbanization and industrialization. Furthermore, they often became morally remote, struggling to understand and address the social and ethical challenges arising in the crowded inner cities.
4. Protestant churches that stayed in the city without sufficient resources often struggled to survive and became isolated. They tended to focus inward, creating a small world disconnected from their surrounding environment and lacking the means, vision, or leadership to minister to the wider urban population.
5. Large, wealthy Protestant churches in the city often centered around charismatic preachers and built magnificent structures, appealing to the wealthy, influential, and intellectually inclined. However, a potential problem they faced was the temptation to accommodate or water down the biblical message to appeal to and retain their affluent congregations.
6. Two examples include the American Sunday School Union, which focused on educating people (including reading the scriptures) and reached out to those suffering under urbanization, and the YMCA, an evangelical movement that aimed to minister spiritually, educationally, socially, and physically to young men in cities.
7. One cultural reason was that revivalism penetrated the anonymity and loneliness of city life by creating community and connection among people. Another reason was that revivals offered excitement and a break from the monotony of daily factory work.
8. The fifth major response was a radical re-understanding of the gospel and the development of a new theology to address urban life, often referred to as the social gospel.
9. The absolute authority that Protestantism had placed on the scriptures and the revelation of God in Christ began to be challenged. This shift was influenced by

factors such as Darwinism, the increasing value placed on science, and a growing emphasis on social change.

10. The three key institutions were leading Protestant seminaries (which trained future preachers), major church pulpits (where sermons were delivered), and leading publications (which disseminated theological ideas). Influence in these areas was significant because it allowed liberal theology to shape the education of religious leaders, the content of religious messages, and the broader theological discourse.

## **Essay Format Questions**

1. Analyze the various ways in which American Protestant churches responded to the rapid urban growth and industrialization of the 19th century. Discuss the motivations, strategies, and potential consequences of at least three different types of responses.
2. Compare and contrast the experiences of Protestant churches and Roman Catholic/immigrant churches in adapting to the challenges and opportunities presented by urbanization in America. What factors contributed to the differing trajectories of these religious groups?
3. Evaluate the success and limitations of the new strategies and organizations (such as the American Sunday School Union, YMCA, and Salvation Army) developed by Protestant groups to minister to urban populations. To what extent did these initiatives effectively address the social and spiritual needs of city dwellers?
4. Discuss the significance of the shift in the understanding of religious authority that occurred in Protestantism leading up to World War I. What were the key factors driving this change, and what were the initial manifestations of this theological reorientation?
5. Explore the two primary characteristics of classical Protestant liberalism (freedom from tradition and adjustment to the modern world). How did these characteristics manifest in the theological developments of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and what were the anticipated goals of this movement?

## Glossary of Key Terms

- **Urbanization:** The process by which an increasing proportion of a population lives in urban areas rather than rural ones.
- **Industrialization:** The process of economic and social transformation from an agrarian and handicraft economy to one dominated by industry and machine manufacturing.
- **Protestantism:** A major branch of Christianity that originated in the 16th-century Reformation, emphasizing the authority of scripture and justification by faith.
- **Roman Catholicism:** The largest Christian church, characterized by its hierarchical structure with the Pope as its head and a distinct set of doctrines and practices.
- **Immigrant Churches:** Religious congregations formed by people who have migrated from one country to another, often retaining cultural and religious traditions from their homeland.
- **Exodus (from the city):** In this context, the movement of Protestant churches and their congregations from urban centers to suburban or rural areas.
- **Geographically Remote:** Being physically distant from the urban areas and the problems associated with them.
- **Morally Remote:** Being disconnected from or unable to understand the ethical and social challenges present in urban environments.
- **Charismatic Preacher:** A religious leader with a compelling personality and powerful speaking skills that attract and inspire followers.
- **Cultured Despisers of Religion:** A term used to describe intellectuals, the wealthy, and the powerful in society who held skeptical or negative views towards traditional religion.
- **Accommodation (of the message):** The act of modifying or adapting religious teachings to make them more appealing or acceptable to a particular audience, potentially diluting core tenets.
- **Non-Denominational Revivalism:** Religious movements characterized by large public meetings aimed at inspiring conversion or renewal, without affiliation to a specific Protestant denomination.

- **Anonymity:** The state of being unknown or unacknowledged in a large and impersonal environment, such as a city.
- **Monotony:** Lack of variety and excitement in daily life, often associated with repetitive industrial work.
- **Social Gospel:** A Protestant theological movement that emphasized the application of Christian ethics to social problems such as poverty, inequality, and injustice.
- **Liberal Theology (Classical Protestant Liberalism):** A theological approach that emerged in the 19th and early 20th centuries, emphasizing reason, experience, and the historical-critical study of the Bible, often seeking to reconcile Christianity with modern science and culture.
- **Authority (religious):** The source from which religious truth and guidance are believed to originate; for traditional Protestantism, this was primarily the scriptures.
- **Darwinism:** The theory of biological evolution by natural selection, proposed by Charles Darwin, which had a significant impact on scientific and religious thought.
- **Modernity:** The historical period characterized by industrialization, urbanization, scientific advancements, and changing social and political structures.
- **Tradition (religious):** The established customs, beliefs, and practices passed down within a religious community.
- **Fundamentalism:** A conservative Protestant movement that arose in the early 20th century in reaction to liberal theology, emphasizing the literal interpretation and infallibility of the Bible and opposing modernism in religious and cultural life.
- **Neo-Orthodoxy:** A theological movement that emerged in the early to mid-20th century as a reaction against liberal theology, emphasizing the transcendence of God and the paradoxical nature of divine revelation, while still engaging with modern thought.

## 5. FAQs Green, American Christianity, Session 17, Urban Growth and the Churches, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions: Urban Growth, Church Responses, and the Rise of Liberal Theology

#### 1. How did rapid industrialization and urbanization in America impact society and create challenges for the churches?

The rise of the industrial and urban world dramatically increased population, territorial expansion, and economic activity. This brought about the factory age, characterized by harsh working conditions including long hours (14-16 hours a day, seven days a week), low wages (around \$1 a day), and a significant division between the wealthy and the poor. These conditions created social problems that the churches had to grapple with, including the well-being of factory workers and their families, and the growing disparity in wealth.

#### 2. What were the two primary consequences of urban change on religious populations in America?

The first consequence was a notable shift within Protestantism, with an increasing number of Protestants becoming disconnected from the church, finding it irrelevant, or even becoming antagonistic towards it. Conversely, Roman Catholics and other immigrant religious groups, such as Lutherans and Jewish people, tended to remain closely connected to their churches and synagogues, which served as vital community and refuge centers in potentially hostile urban environments. The second consequence was a widening gap between people and the church, particularly among Protestants, as churches struggled to effectively minister to the growing urban population.

#### 3. What were the five major ways in which churches responded to urban growth and industrialization in America?

The five major responses were: \* **Exodus from the City:** Many Protestant churches with sufficient resources chose to relocate outside of urban centers, becoming geographically and often morally remote from the problems of industrialization. \* **Struggle for Survival in the City:** Some Protestant churches lacked the means to leave the city and remained in impoverished urban areas, often becoming isolated and struggling to survive without the capacity or vision to minister to their surrounding communities. \* **Ministry to the Wealthy and Influential:** Certain well-resourced Protestant churches stayed in the city, often led by charismatic preachers, and built grand structures. While they ministered to the wealthy and powerful, they sometimes faced the temptation to accommodate or water down the biblical message to appeal to and retain this demographic. \* **New Strategies and Organizations for**

**Outreach:** Various groups developed innovative approaches to reach urban populations. These included the American Sunday School Union, focusing on education and biblical literacy; the YMCA, providing holistic ministry to young men; the Salvation Army, living and ministering directly within inner-city communities; and non-denominational revivalism led by figures like Finney and Moody, which offered spiritual and cultural engagement that resonated with urban dwellers by penetrating anonymity, breaking monotony, and providing a substitute for the theater. \* **Radical Re-understanding of the Gospel:** This response involved a fundamental theological shift, aiming to reinterpret the gospel and develop new theologies, such as the emerging social gospel movement, to directly address the issues of urban life.

**4. How did non-denominational revivalism successfully minister to urban populations, and what were some of the cultural reasons for its impact?** Non-denominational revivalism found a significant response in urban settings, surprising even its proponents. Culturally, it succeeded for several reasons: it penetrated the anonymity and loneliness prevalent in large cities by creating community and connection; it offered excitement and a break from the monotony of factory work; and it served as a substitute for the theater, providing music, drama, and entertainment within a religiously acceptable framework.

**5. What is "classical Protestant liberalism," and what were its key characteristics?** Classical Protestant liberalism was a theological movement that emerged and gained prominence from the late 19th into the 20th century. Its key characteristics can be viewed as two sides of the same coin: freedom from tradition, which involved questioning and moving away from traditional church doctrines and authorities, particularly the absolute authority of scripture; and an adjustment to the modern world, which meant seeking to make the Christian message relevant and appealing to contemporary society by accommodating modern science, social changes, and intellectual thought.

**6. What were the three key institutions through which classical Protestant liberalism exerted its influence in America?** Classical Protestant liberalism significantly impacted American Christianity by gaining influence in: \* **Leading Protestant Seminaries:** Seminaries began to teach liberal theological perspectives, which in turn influenced the training of future pastors. \* **Major Pulpits:** Prominent churches adopted liberal preachers who espoused these new theological ideas from their pulpits. \* **Leading Publications:** Journals and periodicals, such as "The Christian Century," promoted liberal theological viewpoints, shaping public discourse within Protestantism.

**7. What were the two major movements that emerged as a pushback against classical Protestant liberalism?**

Two significant movements arose in response to classical Protestant liberalism: \* **Fundamentalism**: Primarily a Protestant movement, Fundamentalism strongly resisted liberal theology, emphasizing the inerrancy of scripture and traditional doctrines. \* **Neo-Orthodoxy**: This movement, emerging later, also took the Bible seriously but interpreted it through the lens of Reformation theology, particularly Calvinism, seeking to reassert a more traditional theological framework in response to liberalism.

**8. According to the lecture, what was the underlying motivation behind classical Protestant liberalism's theological strategies?** Classical Protestant liberalism was driven by the conviction that Christianity was facing challenges and needed to be "saved" or made relevant in the face of modern thought and societal changes. Therefore, its theological strategies, which involved reinterpreting traditional doctrines and adjusting the message to the modern world, were seen as necessary means to ensure the continued vitality and appeal of Christianity in the contemporary context.