

## Appendix 3: Crawford Gribben

I have lightly accommodated the words of Crawford Gribben who was writing about Ireland, since what he said applies far wider than that. He wrote:

Failure... has marked the entire history of the Christendom-church.<sup>1</sup> By definition, it could not be otherwise. 'Christian Ireland' was never all that it should have been... [the truth is, it never existed – DG]. Failure... has marked the entire history of the church in Christendom.<sup>2</sup> By definition, it could not be otherwise.

The idea of a 'Christian Ireland' – or any 'Christian country' – is a myth invented by Christendom; no such country has ever existed, or ever will. But what Gribben says could not be more relevant to Christendom and the church it has produced.

To let Gribben continue:

Jesus' teachings made no provision for the elaboration of Christian culture, and gave no warrant for that culture to co-opt the structures of pagan religion or the strategies of earthly power. Measured by the standards of the... [the apostolic letters], the church was in ruins long before it became the religion of the Roman Empire, or crossed beyond its boundaries.<sup>3</sup> This ruin was caused by distortions and even denials of the gospel, was manifest in the development of architectural forms, sacramental theories and structures of governance that elevated clergy over laity, and in the turns to persecution that shored up competing quests for power. The source of this failure may be traced to the possibility [too weak – DG] that culture – rather than Scripture – set so much of the church's agenda... As William Kelly... put it: 'Christendom fell away... into the dream of the church triumphant'...<sup>4</sup> Christians should not be astonished at this long

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<sup>1</sup> Original 'Christian Ireland'.

<sup>2</sup> Original 'Christian Ireland'.

<sup>3</sup> Original adds 'into Ireland'.

<sup>4</sup> William Kelly: *Hebrews*.

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history of failure, or the horrors to which it has given birth. After all, the letter that Paul wrote to the... Christians in Galatia warned that the gospel would be manipulated as much as it would be denied.

I break in to say that this is too weak, even wrong: Paul rebuked the Galatians not because the gospel would be manipulated but because they were already – ‘so soon’ – rejecting the apostolic gospel for a false gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

Moreover, as he warned the Ephesian elders, the apostle knew that after he had left, false teachers would infest the *ekklēsia*, and even some of the elders themselves would become false teachers (Acts 20:29-31). As Gribben put it:

Paul predicted that leaders within the church would distort the gospel with horrific consequences for everyone who accepted their teaching. Their distortion of the gospel would be marked by a powerful and hypocritical religious moralism, he warned, in which [professing??? – DG] believers would ‘fall from grace’ by attempting to earn their salvation. Against these dangers, Paul called for Christians to remember that ‘a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ’, who came to ‘deliver us from the present evil age’ rather than to dominate it [or accommodate it, or adapt to it – DG].<sup>5</sup>

This is the abiding law for all believers: they are, of course, *in* the world, but they are not *of* the world, and must never be *of* the world (John 15:18-19; 17:11,14-19; Rom. 12:1-2). Evangelicals today, however, are increasingly accommodating themselves, the *ekklēsia* and the gospel to worldly principles and ways in order ‘to reach’ pagans – ‘in it to win it’ has become ‘of it to win it’.

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<sup>5</sup> Crawford Gribben: *The Rise and Fall of Christian Ireland*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2021, pp209-211.