

CHURCH HISTORY 2

REFORMATION TO TODAY

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Church History 2 (TH2)

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Growth of Protestant Orthodoxy

Lutheran Orthodoxy

- After Luther's death Philip Melanchthon took his place as the main interpreter of Luther's theology, but more conservative Lutherans felt Melanchthon was too influenced by humanism and too willing when pressured to concede points he thought were not critical to the faith – what he called *adiaphora*.
- The strict Lutherans accused the “Philippists” (those supporting Melanchthon) of being Calvinists, and responded with Lutheran Orthodoxy or *Lutheran Scholasticism* – developing massive systems of theology they believed more accurately reflected Luther. (Note that the emphasis was not on expounding the truth of Scripture – as Luther had – but on expounding and defending what they believed Luther had said.) This led to an entrenching of views into rigid forms that lacked openness to other theological opinions and considerations.

Growth of Protestant Orthodoxy

Reformed Orthodoxy

- Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) was a Dutch Calvinist pastor and professor (he had studied in Geneva with Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor). A church in Amsterdam asked Arminius to refute the teaching of Dirck Koornhert, who had questioned Calvin's teaching on predestination. Arminius concluded Koornhert was right, and debates began – not over whether predestination was biblical (everyone agreed it is), but over what it means and how it works.
- Arminius (who otherwise remained a strict Calvinist) developed the view that God “foreknew” all who would believe in Christ, and that predestination constituted God's provision of Jesus Christ for those “elect” to believe in.
- In 1610 the Arminians issued a document or *Remonstrance* stating their five beliefs related to predestination.
- In response the strict Calvinists (mostly Dutch) met as the Synod of Dort in 1618-19 and came up with their own five points, thereafter represented as Five Point Calvinism, or TULIP.

Growth of Protestant Orthodoxy

Reformed Orthodoxy

- The *Canons of Dort* became the strict orthodoxy of the Reformed faith in the Netherlands and other parts of the Continent. After Dort, during the Puritan Revolution in England, the Westminster Assembly of Calvinists scholars and churchmen was called to develop a theology and ecclesiology for a more Calvinist and Puritan church in England. The result was the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, which agreed in basic theology with Dort, but was much more detailed and extensive – including a catechism.
- These two documents – the *Canons of Dort* and the *Westminster Confession* – reflected Reformed (Calvinist) theology throughout the 17th and into the 18th centuries, turning Calvin's theology into a strict orthodoxy just as the strict Lutherans had done with Luther's theology. Both were focused on what they believed was the correct interpretations of their founders' intentions (Luther and Calvin), and both were more dogmatic than Luther or Calvin ever had been. And both succeeded in driving further wedges between Christian bodies in Europe.

Growth of Rationalism

- Since the 13th century and the work of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, philosophy (especially Aristotelian) had been a fundamental tool of theology, with ever-increasing emphases on both the potential of human rationality and on observation of the natural world – both of which became major themes of the Renaissance in Europe (14th-17th centuries).
- Early 17th century, Rene Descarte's *Rationalism* lifted reason and observation to new heights: seeking philosophical and religious truth by doubting everything, then rebuilding believe based on reason & observation. ("I think, therefore I am.")
- In England, John Locke proposed *Empiricism* – that all knowledge is derived from experience – of ourselves, the world around us, and God – and our reason's processing of that experience. Since faith is derived from revelation and not reason, it is a less reliable kind of knowledge. And while Locke said Christianity was the most reasonable of all religions, he believed the same level of truth could be achieved through reason without the Christian *faith*.

Growth of Deism

- In the 17th century in England, partly as a rejection of squabbles over different religious beliefs and the exclusive dogmatism of various orthodoxies, an alternative developed in *Deism*.
- Deism was an effort to find a way to believe – in rejection of atheism or abandonment of religion, and in rejection of narrow dogmatism. It proposed a religion that could be seen as natural to all humankind – not based on revelation or historical events, but on the natural instincts of every person – and so an emphasis again on human reason.
- The principles of Deism included belief in the existence of God (based on evidence for a Creator), the obligation to worship God, the ethical requirements of worship, the need for repentance, and reward and punishment both in this life and the next.
- Christians responded that is you reject all historical events and all revelation, you necessarily also have to reject Jesus Christ.
- But the most devastating blow to Deism – and to all systems based on reliance in human reason and experience – came from Scottish philosopher David Hume.

David Hume's Skepticism

- David Hume (1711-1776) was a Scottish philosopher who started with Locke's Empiricism (and other rationalistic systems) and concluded that the scope of true knowledge was far more limited than had been proposed.
- Hume observed that, while Empiricism said the only true knowledge came from experience, the conclusions we draw from experience actually are only mental habits created from *past* experiences, and cannot be relied on as accurate representations of current reality.
- When we talk about *cause-and-effect*, for example, we are only describing what we witness happening PREVIOUSLY – with no assurance it is going to happen again, or that it reflects a constant in the real world.
- So, Hume said, the insistence by Deists in God's existence because of observation a created order was not truly rational; notions like "soul" and "God" have little meaning; and we cannot be sure of anything...

Immanuel Kant

- Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) was perhaps the greatest philosopher of all time. He claimed reading David Hume awakened him from his “dogmatic slumber.”
- In *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant proposed there is no such thing as innate ideas, but that the mind inherently has fundamental structures (time, space, causality, existence, substance, etc.) into which we must place data we receive in order for it to make sense – otherwise the senses provide only chaotic sensations. What we think of as reality, then, is not things as they are, but things as the mind is able to grasp them in an orderly way. Therefore purely objective knowledge – as proposed by the Cartesians, Empiricists and Deists – is an illusion.
- Also, it is no longer possible to claim proof for the existence of God, or of the soul, or of eternity, because the mind cannot conceive of such things. This does not mean such things do not exist, but simply that reason cannot know them.
- In *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant argues that while “pure reason” cannot prove the existence of God, etc., we also have a “practical reason” that deals with moral life and which works differently from pure reason.

Growth of Spiritualism

- Some people reacted against the rigidness of orthodoxy and the spiritual shallowness of rationalism by seeking more spiritual religious expression.
- Most notable among the Spiritualists was George Fox (1624-1691) founder of the Quaker movement, who wandered England in search of spiritual illumination. During this time he thoroughly studied Scripture – some saying he knew the entire Bible by heart.
- His experience led him to believe that churches, pastors, liturgies, hymns, sermons, sacraments and other structure in worship were hindrances to the Spirit, which God wanted people to experience.
- Rejected by many churches (after speaking out in their services), beaten by mobs, and spending time in jail, Fox eventually organized his followers as the Friends – which others called the Quakers because of their tendency to tremble with religious enthusiasm.
- They had silent worship – people spoke only as they felt God led them to speak or pray; no sacraments (for fear physical elements would detract from the spiritual); paid no tithes; took no oaths; practiced total tolerance and equality (even with outsiders, who tended not to appreciate it).
- Quakerism spread, with Fox visiting and encouraging followers throughout England, the Continent, the Caribbean and the U.S. – where the faith was promoted by William Penn in Pennsylvania.

Growth of Pietism

- *Pietism* was another reaction against rigidity of orthodoxy and the spiritual shallowness of rationalism.
- Technically, Pietism refers only to the German movement led by Philip Spener and August Francke, though it strongly influenced others – including John Wesley and Methodism.
- Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705) was born in an aristocratic Lutheran family in Alsace, studied theology and became a pastor in Frankfurt – where he launched Bible study groups he called “colleges of piety” and published *Pia Desiderata* as a guide to spiritual piety. He advocated “the priesthood of all believers” and thought the laity should focus more on devotion and study. His focus was more on spiritual growth and less on doctrine – which troubled some more strict Lutherans.
- Later Spener focused heavily on Revelation, believing these prophecies were coming to pass. His follower and successor, August Hermann Francke, agreed with everything Spener taught except the emphasis on interpreting current events from Revelation. Francke also worked to keep connected to Lutheranism. Thousands embraced Pietism and joined “colleges of piety,” which spread to Reformed churches as well – contributing to the Great Awakening in America.

Growth of Pietism

- Pietism made an impact on young Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, Spener's godson, who offered refuge on his lands to a group of persecuted and exiled Moravians, eventually joining their community. When he developed a passion for world mission, he passed it on to the **Moravians**, and in 1732 they sent their first missionaries to the Caribbean. Eventually they founded mission communities around the world – including Bethlehem & Nazareth in Pennsylvania and Salem in North Carolina. Eventually the Moravians broke with Lutherans and formed their own church. The church was never large & eventually was unable to continue supporting missions.

Pietism's Influence on John Wesley & Methodism

- In 1735 a group of Moravians were traveling to America for missions. Onboard with them was a young Anglican priest named John Wesley. When the ship was in danger of sinking and Wesley and others were terrified, the Moravians showed no fear – which convicted Wesley that perhaps his faith was not real in the same way as the Moravians.
- After returning to England (his position in Georgia did not work out), he contacted the Moravians and one of them became his spiritual advisor – which led to Wesley having a “conversion” experience in May 1738.

Christianity in America

- The hegemony initially enjoyed by Portugal and Spain in the Americas diminished in the 17th century, as France and Great Britain both established a presence in North America – most notably in Britain's Thirteen Colonies.
- Rhode Island (founded by Roger Williams in 1631) was built as a harbor for religious Freedom; and Pennsylvania (founded by William Penn in 1681) was created as a model of Quaker tolerance. Otherwise, the colonies generally were as intolerant as any of the countries they had left in Europe – most being Puritan Protestant, with the notable exception of Maryland, which Lord Baltimore created as a Catholic enclave and option for immigrants.
- While some fled to the New World for religious freedom, most came for the economic opportunities (especially growing and exporting tobacco). Many rigorous Puritans found themselves feeling less rigorous as they became prosperous in the new world.
- Georgia was intended to be a border against Spanish moves northward, and as a penal colony – an alternative to the horrors of English prisons for debtors and other lesser criminals.

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- While some fled to the New World for religious freedom, most came for the economic opportunities (especially growing and exporting tobacco). Many rigorous Puritans found themselves less rigorous as they became prosperous in the new world. So slavery was introduced.
- Georgia was intended to be a border against Spanish moves northward, and as a penal colony – an alternative to the horrors of English prisons for debtors and other lesser criminals.