

MBC Equipping Hour 2019

Church History

Week 5: 17th & 18th Centuries

Introduction

The Reformation had far greater influence than Luther, Zwingli, Calvin or any other reformer could have ever imagined. Like dropping a stone in a lake, the ripples are still being felt today and will continue throughout history. What the Reformation did, which no one could have predicted, was cast off the shackles of religion and allow people to think for themselves. Which was positive when the Bible was the foundation of that thought, but unfortunately that was not always the case.

Post-Reformation England

The Act of Uniformity which was passed by English Parliament in 1662. It stated that public prayer, how the sacraments were administered and other rites such as marriage and baptism must be done according to the Book of Common Prayer¹. In order to be any governmental or church office one would have to adhere to this without fail. All ministers, deacons, bishops and pastors had to be ordained again according to this law.

At the passing and subsequent enforcing of the law, over 2000 clergymen refused to take the oath and were ejected.² The Act of Uniformity was a part of four laws passed:

The Corporation Act (1661) - These first of the four statutes which made up the Clarendon Code required all municipal officials to take Anglican communion. This legislation was rescinded in 1828.

The Act of Uniformity (1662...see above)

The Conventicle Act (1664) - This act forbade conventicles (a meeting for unauthorized worship) of more than 5 people who were not members of the same household. The purpose was to prevent dissenting religious groups from meeting.

The Five Mile Act (1665) - This final act of the Clarendon Code was aimed at Nonconformist ministers, who were forbidden from coming within five miles of incorporated towns or the place of their former livings. They were also forbidden to teach in schools. This act was not rescinded until 1812.

¹ We still use some of this today in our services.

² Known as the Great Ejection of 1662

Therefore, anyone who was an English subject and did not adhere to the Anglican Church was called a non-conformist. Groups such as Presbyterians, Calvinists, Baptists, Congregationalists and other groups as they were formed.

Quakers³

The Quakers, or the Religious Society of Friends, began when people within the Church of England saw corruption and false doctrine rise in that body in the 1650s. With Puritanism also came a type of Phariseeism driven by personal pride and doctrinal divisiveness. A non-conformist movement was started by those who sought to distance themselves from Puritanism. The earliest dissenters went about seeking others of like mind and practice and were thus called "Seekers." When they met together, it was not to formally pray or preach, but simply to wait together for God to speak to them.

The Quakers viewed the traditional Christian as "conceited of himself, and strong in his own will and righteousness, overcome with blind zeal and passion." George Fox, the founder of Quakerism, said the name "Quaker" was first used as a derogatory term in court, "because we bid them tremble at the Word of God." Quakers were persecuted widely in England and the American Colonies and were often imprisoned or put to death for their beliefs. Because of this widespread persecution, William Penn founded the Pennsylvania Colony to provide a safe haven for Quakers.

Jacobus Arminius

While the Church of England was tightening their control over their people, the Dutch Reformed Church (the unofficial State church) were going through their own issues. When asked to defend the doctrines of grace (Calvinism), Arminius found himself at odds with the teaching. His major issues were with unconditional election, limited atonement and irresistible grace. He was the first to teach the doctrine of prevenient grace, where one has enough grace from the Holy Spirit to choose to be saved, even though they are totally depraved.⁴

Just as with Calvin, he did not come up with his "5 points." It was not until after his death in 1609 that his followers formulated the Five Articles of the Remonstrants in 1610. In response to the teaching which directly went against the Dutch Reformed Church, the Synod of Dort was called in 1618-19 to stop the teaching and the spread of Arminianism. This Synod had representatives from all around Europe who represented many Calvinistic churches. The Synod officially rejected Arminianism and put their own five points in response.⁵

³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Quakers-Friends.html>

⁴ Arminius stated that "the grace sufficient for salvation is conferred on the Elect, and on the Non-elect; that, if they will, they may believe or not believe, may be saved or not be saved."

⁵ These would become what we know as the five points of Calvinism...TULIP

Calvinism and Arminianism

In the aftermath of the Reformation until the early-1900's when Pentecostalism reared its ugly head, the church would constantly battle within herself over these two doctrines. Sometimes the battles ended in blood and other times simply the splitting up of old-time friends. At the heart of this issue is how one views God's power and sovereignty and man's ability to do anything spiritually good. Obviously this is still a heated debate today and splits the church just as it did a few hundred years ago.

Pietism

As the English and the Dutch were seeking to maintain control and right doctrine, the German Lutheran Church was facing similar issues. The German church had become formal, and perhaps stale to many. Though few groups today would identify themselves as Pietist, there are many modern churches which have been significantly impacted by Pietist teaching. Pietism is a movement within Christianity that attempts to focus on individual holiness and a consistent Christian life. It is typically led by laymen or local pastors who are frustrated with the perceived hypocrisy or inconsistency within the larger church. There have been several Pietist movements, each one leading to the expansion of new denominations or fellowships.

In Germany in the 1670's reform began to take place in the Protestant Lutheran Church. Philipp Jakob Spener, who had been influenced by Pietist and Waldensian teachers, was convinced of the need for a moral and religious reformation within German Lutheranism. He saw a rigid orthodoxy sapping the zeal from the Christian life of the church. To counter that, he began meetings in his home where he encouraged personal and small-group Bible study, involvement in church leadership by laymen, and a preaching style which would implant Christianity in the inner man and result in visible fruits of good works. Many of these Lutherans stayed within the church and attempted to enact these reforms. Others left and formed a variety of new churches, most of them with names including the term "Brethren." Swedish Lutherans who were influenced by Spener's teachings came to America and formed the Evangelical Covenant Church and the Evangelical Free Church of America. In England, the Pietist movement impacted John Wesley, who began the Methodist movement.⁶

The Pietist's form of Christianity is suspicious of doctrinal certainty, emphasizes faith-based activism, especially on behalf of the marginalized and oppressed and is centered on a fruitful Christian life following the example of Jesus. With their push to simply follow Jesus and not worry about doctrine, they also are heavily ecumenical and can tend to only see the "red letters" as the important ones in Scripture. They rely too much on emotions and give way to them at the expense of Biblical accuracy.

⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Pietism.html>

Though they could be off at times, they did bring a new life to a seemingly dead church in Germany (and subsequently around the world). It is responsible for much of evangelicalism in North America and what we consider the modern missions movement.

Count Von Zinzendorf, born in Germany (1700) and raised by his extremely Pietist grandmother, would be a leading voice of Pietism. At around 20 years of age, he sought to reconcile the Lutheran Church with the Pietists but was unsuccessful. In 1721 he became the king's judicial counselor at Dresden. It was here that he opened his home for meetings to provide spiritual edification for those seeking it.

Zinzendorf purchased a large estate, which included the village of Berthelsdorf near the Bohemian frontier in Saxony. He invited persecuted believers to settle on his land. Soon Christians from different countries and religious backgrounds, among whom were descendants of the ancient *Unitas Fratrum* of the Bohemian Brethren, sought refuge here. A colony was established and named "Herrnhut" (the Lord's Watch). Discord arose in Herrnhut due to disagreements over doctrinal and cultural matters. Zinzendorf intervened in 1727 and established common regulations by which all could live, and thus peace was restored. He also resigned his governmental post that year and moved to Herrnhut in the summer.⁷

In 1731, while visiting the King of Denmark, Zinzendorf met a slave named Anthony from the Danish West Indies. Anthony was invited to Herrnhut, and there he spoke of the condition of the slaves in the West Indies. Some in Herrnhut were moved to visit the slaves and work among them to both help them and bring them the gospel. This was the start of the Moravian mission work.⁸

Zinzendorf traveled for nearly ten years, many times on foot, visiting Germany, Switzerland, Holland, England, and America among other places. He was accompanied by the Pilgrim Congregation, a band of believers who participated in the establishment of new settlements after the pattern of Herrnhut. One such settlement, called Herrnhut, was visited in 1738 by John Wesley, who remarked, "Oh when shall this Christianity cover the earth, as waters cover the sea." Zinzendorf trained people to go out as an evangelical and ecumenical witness.⁹

The Moravian Church has long been associated with missionary activity. In 1732 missionaries from Herrnhut went to St. Thomas Island. Missions efforts expanded to the rest of the Caribbean (largely to the African slave population there), Greenland, Labrador (to the Inuit people), Surinam, Guyana, South Africa and North American Indians. The pioneering efforts of the Moravians in spreading the gospel were responsible for untold thousands of people coming to faith in Christ. It was through the testimony of the Moravians that John Wesley experienced conversion.

⁷ *Who's Who in Christianity*

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*

Moravian missionaries came to the United States during the colonial period. The Moravians gained a permanent presence in Pennsylvania by 1741. The Moravian Church now has about one million members, mostly in eastern Africa, but also in the Caribbean basin; South Africa; Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.¹⁰

The 1st (and only)¹¹ Great Awakening (1735-1743)

The colonial revival was called a *great* awakening because it touched so many regions and so many aspects of colonial life. Although the Great Awakening represented more a general upsurge of revivalistic piety than a distinct event, it was vastly important for both the churches and American society. In New England the revival brought new life to many Congregational churches and greatly stimulated the growth of the Baptists. In the middle colonies the Presbyterians and the Dutch Reformed, after initial divisions over revival practices, ended by growing rapidly because of its emphases. In the southern colonies, which were affected in the last phases of the Awakening, the revival led to new growth for Baptists and began to prepare the way for the great Methodist movement of the post-Revolutionary period. It also bridged the yawning cultural divide between blacks and whites. The Awakening was made up of local revivals, but it did have two “national” leaders, an English preacher, George Whitefield, and a New England theologian, Jonathan Edwards.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)¹²

Under the influence of Edwards’ preaching, Northampton and neighboring parishes experienced a powerful spiritual awakening in 1734–1735. Beginning in 1739, again under the influence of Edwards’ preaching another more extensive religious revival occurred, known as the Great Awakening. During this time Edwards made the acquaintance of George Whitefield, who was instrumental in promoting Edwards abroad.

Controversy arose between Edwards and his congregation when he sought to restrict admission to Communion to only those who could give satisfactory evidence of conversion. In 1750 he was dismissed from his charge at Northampton and the following year resettled in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where he led the small Stockbridge church and served as teacher and missionary to the Housatonnoc Indians who resided in the vicinity. In 1758 he reluctantly assumed duties as president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton) but died a month later (March 22) of a smallpox inoculation.

His reputation and influence as a preacher and advocate of experiential religion grew quickly. In 1734 Edwards preached two sermons on the subject of justification, which caused a spiritual awakening among his and neighboring congregations. News of the revival spread as far as Britain and elicited from Edwards a written account of the events that was published in 1737 as *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*. In it Edwards interpreted the revival as a

¹⁰ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Moravian-Church.html>

¹¹ Author’s bias (we will discuss the so called 2nd Great Awakening next week)

¹² *Who’s Who in Christian History*

genuine work of God's redemptive grace among the people of New England. Three years later, during the first Great Awakening, Edwards wrote two influential works in defense of the revival that established him as the leading theologian of the movement. *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* was published in 1741 and set forth a theological defense of the revival, explicating and defending it as authentic by distinguishing "true signs" of religious experience from "false signs." In 1743 this work was expanded and published as *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival*. In addition to answering the critics of the revival, here Edwards also stressed the aberrant nature of religious experience in order to temper revival enthusiasts.

In addition to his writings, Edwards' preaching also was used to promote revivalism. While it is true that Whitefield's preaching more than anything else set the colonies ablaze with revival, the most famous sermon preached during the Great Awakening, and likely the most famous sermon in all American history, was Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," delivered in Enfield in 1741.

Regarded as the leading theologian of his day and one of the greatest thinkers America has yet produced, Edwards' importance rests primarily upon his contributions in the areas of practical and theoretical religion and his championing of evangelical Calvinism. Two early sermons laid the groundwork. "God Glorified in Man's Dependence," delivered in Boston in 1731 and published a month later, attacked the liberal notions of sin and salvation, attributing them to the destructive developments of incipient Arminianism.

George Whitefield (1714-1770)¹³

At Oxford he was befriended by John and Charles Wesley and became part of the Holy Club, a group of young men devoted to the regular practice of Christian duties. While at Oxford he experienced an evangelical conversion and became convinced of the absolute necessity of spiritual regeneration for salvation. After receiving ordination as a deacon in the Church of England in 1736, he began preaching on the necessity of the "New Birth."

When opposition to his preaching resulted in churches closing their doors to him, he began preaching wherever and whenever the opportunity presented itself, such as in meeting houses of religious societies, public halls, barns, and (far more scandalous at the time) open fields. As an itinerant preacher he was tireless. In his nearly thirty-four years of ministry he spoke more than fifteen thousand times to literally millions of people. In addition to Wales, Ireland, and his own England, he made fourteen visits to Scotland and seven trips across the Atlantic to the American colonies.

Whitefield's friendship with the Wesleys became strained as differences in theology became apparent. Whitefield, a decided Calvinist, freely preached on the bound will, God's electing grace, and the definite Atonement, themes that were at odds with John Wesley's Arminianism. In 1741 they officially broke from each other but maintained a mutual respect for

¹³ Ibid

the rest of their lives. Whitefield was neither a theologian nor the organizer that John Wesley was, but for sheer oratory he was unsurpassed, and as a preacher he did not allow doctrinal issues to determine where he would minister. He freely crossed ecclesiastical boundaries, and though Anglican, he cooperated readily with all denominations and was equally at home in America and in England.

Routinely claimed as the founder of American revivalism, Whitefield was the leading figure in the eighteenth-century American revival known as the Great Awakening.

John Wesley (1703-1791)¹⁴

While Wesley was at Oxford, he joined his brother Charles, George Whitefield and others in a venture that was to be the cradle of the Methodist movement.

These earnest young men caused a sensation at Oxford by frequently meeting together for Bible study, communion, and prayer. They were derisively referred to as the Holy Club, Sacramentarians, Bible moths (feeding on the Bible as moths on cloth), Bible bigots, and Methodists. John was called the “curator” or “father” of the Holy Club.

Charles had started the group while John was away serving at Wroote. He said the word *Methodist* “was bestowed on himself and his friends because of their strict conformity to the method of study prescribed by the university.” John did not care for the nickname but wore it as a badge of honor and in an early sermon spoke of his associates as “the people in derision called Methodists.” Later, in his *English Dictionary*, he defined a Methodist as “one that lives according to the *method* laid down in the Bible.”

On January 1, 1733, in the midst of the controversy surrounding the “Oxford Methodists,” John preached his second university sermon, “The Circumcision of the Heart.” This sermon helped establish him as a theologian because it won approval from both the vice-chancellor and the rector of Lincoln. In it Wesley set forth the two doctrines that were basic to his position at that time: Christian perfection and the witness of the Spirit (that we are the children of God—Rom. 8:16).

Desiring to minister in the colonies to the Indians, John Wesley failed decisively in Georgia, but the experience proved to be important to his future career. The preface to this American disaster came during a violent storm on the voyage from England. Wesley was cowering in fear of death yet witnessed the unexplainable peace experienced by a group of Moravian Brethren who were his fellow travelers. An interview with the Moravians’ leader upon landing in Georgia set in motion John’s search for the living reality of the doctrines he preached.

¹⁴ Ibid

Wesley left Georgia on December 2, 1737. On January 24, 1738, he wrote in his *Journal*: “I went to America to convert the Indians; but O! who shall convert me? Who, what is he that shall deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion. I can talk well; nay, and believe myself while no danger is near; but let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled. Nor can I say, ‘To die is gain.’ ... I show my faith by my works by staking my all upon it.... O who will deliver me from this fear of death?”

Back in London John met Peter Bohler, a Moravian who instructed him in the assurance of salvation by faith. This and his reading of Luther’s commentary on Galatians, which emphasized justification by faith alone, prepared him for the day he attended a Moravian meeting near his old school, Charterhouse.

Encouraged by an account of the Great Awakening in New England by Jonathan Edwards and by George Whitefield’s successes at outdoor preaching, Wesley swept away his ecclesiastical and High Church views and began preaching in fields at Bristol (1739). The Methodist revival in England had begun. “I look upon the world as my parish,” he wrote, “Thus far, I mean, that in whatever part I am in, I judge it meet, right, and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation.”

The Methodist Revival caused great tumult in England. Rioting mobs often threatened the lives of Wesley and his followers. Methodism eventually emerged as an evangelical order within the Church of England, though it was never appreciated or approved by the Church hierarchy. Church doors continued to be closed to Wesley’s teaching. This produced a poignant and triumphant scene at Epworth in May 1742. Refused the pulpit in the parish where he was born and where his father devoted nearly forty years to the service of God, John stood on his father’s tombstone in the churchyard and preached for eight evenings to the greatest crowds Epworth had ever seen. He returned to London and described the scene to his ailing mother. Susanna Wesley died in July 1742, happy to have witnessed the revival of religion her husband had long desired.

What was going on in the culture around Christianity?

The Enlightenment or Age of Reason (1650’s-1800’s)

The Enlightenment represents the loosening of the state and society from ecclesiastical control and the emergence of a culture largely secular in character. The theories and sanctions of modern social and political life are no longer derived from biblical revelation or Church authority but independently arrived at by natural reason and social experience. An essential feature of the Enlightenment and of our modern culture since the eighteenth century is the growing separation of Western civilization from the authority of Church and theological dogma.¹⁵

¹⁵ James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought From the Enlightenment to Vatican II*

Enlightenment scholar Ernest Cassirer noted: “If we were to look for a general characteristic of the age of enlightenment, the traditional answer would be that its fundamental feature is obviously a critical and skeptical attitude toward religions.”

Religion was an oft-discussed topic of the Enlightenment. It is important to view this period in light of the Protestant Reformation that preceded it. The monolithic nature of the church had come to an end, and Enlightenment thinkers had already been freed, to a large degree, by the dialogue and writings that came out of the Reformation. It should be noted that many prominent thinkers of the Enlightenment were Christians, although some were unorthodox in their beliefs. Primary themes of Enlightenment thought on religion center on the notions of anti-supernaturalism, deism, and, as it relates to Christianity, biblical criticism.¹⁶

These three themes, anti-supernaturalism, deism and biblical criticism came out of The Enlightenment and influenced Christianity to this day. Because their battle-cry was rationalism, things which are known before experience, and empiricism, things which can be known by the senses, the supernatural was heavily questioned during this time. anything contrary to the normal operation of the Laws of Nature were to be held at a distance and one was to be skeptical about it. The things against normal reason in Scripture (heaven, hell, angels, Satan, etc.) were archaic and relics from past traditions.

Deism taught that whatever supreme intelligence was out there, did not get involved in creation. This is when the analogy of the watchmaker came to be, he makes the watch but it works on its own. The Bible became a good moral guide and having a personal relationship with God was not only nonsensical but also unneeded.

Arguably the heaviest hit that Christianity took was with regards to the Bible. Up until this point, the Bible was often misused and withheld from the local people, but it was rarely questioned in its authenticity.¹⁷ Because biblical criticism did not really come about until this time, it was viewed through The Enlightenment lens. The main points of thought were textual, source, redaction, canon and form criticism. Though these have all been since refuted throughout the years by careful and conservative scholarship, many still have fallen prey to its thought process.

This is the beginning of what is known as the Modern Age.

¹⁶ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Enlightenment-Christianity.html>

¹⁷ This is to mean its source, power, Apostolic authorship, inspiration and sufficiency.

Industrial Revolution (1760-1840)

The American Revolution (1776)

On the heels of The Great Awakening, the colonies were ready for change. Part of the fuel which brought about the American Revolution was the Great Awakening and the casting off of Britain's religious control. What seeped out of the churches and to the people was freedom. Right or wrong, it had the support and leadership from the local churches and the colonies broke free from their master.

The French Revolution (1789)¹⁸

The turning point in the history of Christianity represented by the dechristianizing effort of the French Revolution was the end—or at least the beginning of the end—of European Christendom as the dominant expression of Christianity in the world. The ideal of Christendom had held sway in Europe for close to a millennium and a half. In that ideal the interests of Christianity and the interests of European civilization were regarded as two expressions of the same reality. But now at the end of the eighteenth century that ideal was very badly frayed. Both Catholic-Protestant competition and a constant series of inter-European wars had undermined notions of European unity. At least from the middle of the seventeenth century, an increasing number of European intellectuals used new ideas about the natural world, society, and the nature of things in general to attack the established churches, to question traditional views of divine revelation, and even (in an unprecedented step) to doubt the existence of God.

¹⁸ Mark A. Noll *Turning Points*