

## Church History

### Lesson 35 - Intellectual and Spiritual Developments in the 17th and 18th Centuries

#### Introduction

- Last time we looked at some major developments in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. These included the Thirty Years War, the situation in France, and developments in England, and Scotland.
- We noted that the incredible amounts of conflict and bloodshed made many people weary of war, and wary of dogmatism.
- This all helped pave the way for a number of intellectual and spiritual developments we will look at today.

#### 1. Developments in the Roman Catholic Church

- 1.1. The Council of Trent had defined the official response of the Roman Catholic Church over against Protestant teachings. These official positions would hold significant sway and would remain the official positions of the RCC for the next 400 years until the Vatican II council.
- 1.2. One clear effect of Trent was to strengthen the Papacy. Protestants of all stripes objected to the Papacy, and thus it was natural for the RCC to react in an opposite manner.
- 1.3. Opposition to the growth in Papal power - Gallicanism
  - 1.3.1. Growing Papal power was bound to come into conflict with growing nationalist sentiments. As various countries became cognizant of their identity as a distinct nation, and as governments became more powerful and centralized, this led to conflict with the Papacy.
  - 1.3.2. The movements against the increased power of the Papacy became known as Gallicanism. This is because they found their locus in France (ancient Gaul).
  - 1.3.3. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that when the Papacy had been at low ebb in the Middle Ages and under the domination of France, a number of concessions had been made to the French Church. When Trent tried to in essence revoke these and centralize power further in Rome, the church in France objected.
  - 1.3.4. For these reasons, the French Parliament had not even promulgated by French Parliament as late as 1615. When the RCC clergy finally published the rulings of Trent, this only further increased suspicion of those who looked “beyond the mountains” for their authority.
  - 1.3.5. However, France was not the only place where such sentiments took hold. Justin Febronius published a book called *The State of the Church and the Legitimate Power of the Roman Pontiff*. This sparked a movement that claimed that power lay with the bishops, not the Pope. The book was condemned as heretical, but that did not stop its influence.
  - 1.3.6. Even the Holy Roman Emperor determined to train his own clergy, shut down monasteries deemed to be too traditional, and led a reformation of the church in Austria and Hungary. This too was condemned in 1794.

#### 1.4. The Jesuits

- 1.4.1. The Jesuits were viewed as especially dedicated to the Papacy. Therefore they were viewed with great suspicion by both Protestants and many Roman Catholics. This situation was further exacerbated by the Jesuits often intolerant policies.
- 1.4.2. The Jesuits were particularly unwelcome in France because they had often sided with the Hapsburg family (Spain/Austria) against the Bourbon Dynasty (France).
- 1.4.3. When the Jesuits were implicated in a plot to assassinate Joseph I of Portugal in 1758, they were expelled from the country and all of its colonies. This was followed by an expulsion from France in 1764, and Spain and its colonies in 1767. Even Naples joined in and expelled them.
- 1.4.4. In 1769 the Bourbon ambassador to Rome presented a resolution to the Pope to dissolve the Jesuits entirely. In 1773, Pope Clement XIV actually ordered the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits) dissolved. However, the Society continued in places such as Prussia, Russia, and Poland. They were eventually restored by Papal decree in 1814.

#### 1.5. Jansenism

- 1.5.1. The Council of Trent had condemned the teachings of Luther and Calvin on grace and predestination. However, many worried that these condemnations had gone too far and actually were a condemnation of the teachings of Augustine.
- 1.5.2. This was exacerbated with Spanish Jesuits affirmed that predestination was based on God's foreknowledge. The Dominican leaders responded that this was contrary to Augustine and thus should be condemned. This ended up before the Spanish Inquisition, where the Jesuits accused the Dominicans of being Calvinists, and the Dominicans accused the Jesuits of being Pelagians. Ultimately the question was turned over to Rome, which told both sides that they must stop making false accusations against the other.
- 1.5.3. In 1640, in a posthumous work, Cornelius Jansenius recapitulated the teachings of Augustine on grace and predestination. However, the work was determined to be too close to the teachings of Calvin and thus the work was condemned in 1643 by Pope Urban VIII.
- 1.5.4. Later, the name of Jansenism was associated with a reform movement that included Blaise Pascal. However, this was usually not centered on teachings of grace and predestination, but rather grew out of social and political considerations. Louis XIV eventually attempted to crush the movement, and it was finally condemned again in 1713 by Clement XI.

#### 1.6. Quietism

- 1.6.1. Quietism is the name given to a spiritualist movement that arose and over time morphed. The essence of this movement was a life of passivity before God. In essence, the believer appeared to almost simply disappear. This was often so extreme that one could not even allow needs of the neighbor or the humanity of Christ to interfere with the soul's contemplation of God.

- 1.6.2. This movement spread in various forms, often in reaction to what appeared to be a dry orthodoxy. One of the most famous adherents was Madame Guyon. Her fame in France was widespread, but her beliefs had problems. For example, she stated that sometimes to offer a true sacrifice to God one might even have to sin. This obviously raised caution flags!
- 1.6.3. However, many people following these spiritual practices did live in an exemplary manner which was viewed in stark contrast to more worldly clergy who were consumed with worldly power.

## **2. Developments Within Protestantism**

### **2.1. Protestant Scholasticism**

- 2.1.1. During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a movement known as Protestant Scholasticism exercised great sway in Lutheran and Reformed circles. The main feature of this new scholasticism was its emphasis on systematic thought. While Calvin had been a great systematizer, Luther had not given himself to this task. Although Melancthon had written a short systematic work, it needed great expansion. This was an important and natural growth in the Protestant movement.
- 2.1.2. The theologians of Protestant scholasticism wrote lengthy, detailed systematic theologies. These works were similar to the work of the medieval scholastic writings in detail, size, scope, and in their use of careful distinctions and analyses. This led to the obvious correlation between the two groups by giving them the same name.
- 2.1.3. A second similarity was that Protestant scholastics also made use of much of the thought of Aristotle, which was a hallmark of medieval scholasticism.
- 2.1.4. A third similarity is that Protestant scholasticism was associated with schools. The original leaders of the Reformation were first and foremost pastors and leaders in local churches. The theological leaders of the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century tended to be teachers in schools rather than pastors in local churches.

2.2. One important doctrinal legacy of Protestant scholasticism was a careful development of the doctrine of biblical inspiration. The early Reformers had obviously believed the Scripture was inspired by God, but the scholastics developed and systematized this doctrine, considering exactly what is entailed when one speaks of the divine inspiration of the biblical writers and text. This doctrine was also important as a bulwark against the RCC teaching on Tradition. The scholastics taught that even if there had been apostolic tradition it was not divinely inspired like Scripture, and was therefore not of equal authority.

### **2.3. Georg Calixtus and "Syncretism"**

- 2.3.1. Calixtus (1586-1656) was a theology teacher at a Lutheran university. During his studies and afterward he traveled widely and met many leading reformers. As a result, he developed a strong desire for unity among all Christians.
- 2.3.2. Calixtus wrote several works with the intention of encouraging Christians to make a distinction between the essential and the secondary. Although he believed Lutheran theology was closest to the truth, this did not make others heretics. As long as they affirmed the central truths of Christianity, they should be affirmed as brothers and sisters in Christ.

- 2.3.3. Calixtus believed that the essentials were found in “the consensus of the first five centuries.” This common core is largely found in the creeds of the early church. To deny these teachings is heresy. However, other matters are not necessary for salvation - or else the early Christians were not believers! This does not mean that the other matters are of no import - but they must not be a cause of division and accusations of heresy.
  - 2.3.4. This meant that even a teaching such as justification by faith alone, while clearly biblical and correct, should not lead to charges of heresy or refusal of cooperation since it was not part of the early creeds. The same would be true of the nature of the presence of Christ in communion.
  - 2.3.5. Not surprisingly, Calixtus was accused from many other corners. Some accused him of being a closet Roman Catholic, while others accused him of being a closet Calvinist. He was too Protestant for the RCC, and too open to the RCC and Reformed churches for many Lutherans. Rather than becoming more open to one another over time, the various groups were becoming more rigidly separated from one another, stressing ever finer points of doctrine. However, many consider him a forerunner of the ecumenical movement of later centuries.
- 2.4. Reformed Orthodoxy
- 2.4.1. The Synod of Dort
    - 2.4.1.1. Jacobus Arminius was a distinguished pastor who had been trained at Geneva under Theodore Beza (Calvin’s successor). His preaching brought him widespread fame in Amsterdam.
    - 2.4.1.2. Arminius was asked to refute the ideas of Dirck Koornhert, a theologian who rejected some aspects of Calvin’s theology, especially regarding predestination.
    - 2.4.1.3. As he studied in preparation to do this, Arminius eventually decided he agreed with Koornhert. When Arminius became professor of theology at the University of Leiden in 1603, the dispute grew. One of his colleagues, Francis Gomarus, began to clash with Arminius. Both believed in predestination, but Arminius believed that predestination was based on God’s foreknowledge of faith in Christ, while Gomarus, following Calvin and Augustine, taught that faith was a result of predestination, not its cause. In almost every other matter Arminius was a strict Calvinist, but he diverged on this matter of predestination.
    - 2.4.1.4. Although Arminius died in 1609, the debate continued. Soon, political and economic considerations also became part of the debate. This happened because merchants, who wanted better relations with Roman Catholic Spain, sided with the followers of Arminius, while the majority of clergy and the lower classes were strict Calvinists. This only served to harden the lines.
    - 2.4.1.5. In 1610, the Arminian party issued a document or Remonstrance listing five key points. These were:
      - 1. Predestination is God’s decree before the world began that those would be saved who have faith in Christ. Any discussion of the cause of this divine decree is useless speculation.

2. Jesus died for all human beings, although only believers receive the benefits of his death.
3. To undermine accusations of Pelagianism, they affirmed humans can do nothing good apart from God's grace.
4. Grace is not irresistible.
5. There is not sufficient data to determine if those who have believed can fall away.

2.4.1.6. Eventually, the political tides turned against the Remonstrants. This led to the calling of the Synod of Dort, which met from November 1618 to May 1619. Invitations were sent to Reformed churches in other parts of Europe. Of the almost 100 delegates, over a quarter came from places such as England, Germany, and Switzerland. The Synod condemned Arminianism, affirming five doctrines which are often remembered by the acronym TULIP:

1. T - Total Depravity: Humans are depraved in every part of their nature, including their will, and thus can do nothing to save themselves - even choosing to believe.
2. U - Unconditional Election: God's election is not based on foreknowledge of human faith, but purely His own pleasure and choice.
3. L - Limited Atonement: Christ's death was for the elect, and not for humanity in general
4. I - Irresistible Grace: the grace of God that effects salvation will not be resisted by those God has chosen.
5. P - Perseverance of the Saints: those whom God has chosen, called by grace, and regenerated by His Spirit will persevere in faith until the end. They will not fall away from grace and lost their salvation.

2.4.1.7. The Remonstrants were immediately condemned and punished. Arminian believers were fined, the clergy were ordered to leave the country, and were often imprisoned if they failed to do so. Fortunately, these strictures short-lived, and toleration was granted in 1631. However, the Synod of Dort has been taken as defining Reformed Orthodoxy on these points ever since this time.

## 2.4.2. The Westminster Assembly and Confession

2.4.2.1. The background of the Westminster Assembly was covered in Lesson 34, and the struggle between the Puritans, the Scots, the Irish, parliament, and the monarchy.

2.4.2.2. The Westminster Confession of Faith, and its associated catechisms, are far more detailed than the Canons of Dort. Rather than dealing with the narrow question of predestination and grace, it covers the whole range of Christian doctrine.

2.4.2.3. For this reason, the Westminster standards have become the basis of Reformed orthodoxy and practice in most English speaking Reformed denominations.

### **3. The Enlightenment and Rationalism**

- 3.1.** As we have seen, the religious wars and increasing dogmatism of the various Christian groups in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century had the effect of increasing doctrinal precision, but also weariness of war and conflict, and wariness regarding religious dogma based upon revelation.
- 3.2.** All of this led to a growing confidence in the powers of human reason to determine truth and find a basis for universal agreement. This movement happened over time in various countries, and although there were disagreements between the various proponents at almost every point, it is generally known as a single movement called the Enlightenment.
- 3.3.** Key movements and figures in the Enlightenment
  - 3.3.1.** Natural science
    - 3.3.1.1.** Under the leadership of men like Francis Bacon, Galileo, and Isaac Newton. The hallmarks of this movement were a great trust in human observation and reason to understand nature, the growth of a scientific method of experimentation and observation to determine the truth of how the world actually operates.
    - 3.3.1.2.** The obvious great success of these “natural philosophers” to understand and predict natural phenomena seemed to confirm the confidence in human reason and observation as opposed to trusting in ancient sources of wisdom. For some, this growing distrust of ancient sources of wisdom even included Scripture. For others, however, God’s two books of Scripture and nature would eventually be seen to coincide.
  - 3.3.2.** Rationalism
    - 3.3.2.1.** Rene Descartes (1596-1650) marked a major shift in philosophy. He operated based on a profound suspicion of all that could not be proven to be absolutely certain.
    - 3.3.2.2.** In the search for absolute certainty, Descartes arrived at his own thoughts - Cogito ergo sum “I think therefore I am.” So radical was his doubt, that what was affirmed in this statement is not even Descartes body, for that might be an illusion, but rather only his thought.
    - 3.3.2.3.** However, Descartes remained a faithful Roman Catholic who thought he could prove the existence of God as the “more perfect Being” since if He could conceive of it with his mind it must be placed there by God. Only at this point did Descartes then go on to accept the reality of his body and the external world.
    - 3.3.2.4.** However, many theologians rejected Cartesian philosophy as it came to be known. Others, though, thought that this new system should be adopted in service of the faith.
  - 3.3.3.** Empiricism
    - 3.3.3.1.** In Great Britain, the great philosophical movement was not rationalism but empiricism. A key figure in this movement was John Locke (1632-1704). Although he agreed with some of Descartes, he believed knowledge did not arrive from within, but rather through experience - both those coming from the senses and also through the operation of our mind in knowing ourselves.

- 3.3.3.2.** Locke held that much of life was not conducted based on certainty, but rather on probability, which he called judgment. He included faith, which is based on revelation and therefore does not have the certainty of human reason, in this category. This began the division of “faith” and “fact” which would grow in the coming years.
- 3.3.4. Deism**
- 3.3.4.1.** Another movement initially growing in England was Deism. This group believed that God had created the universe, but then more or less left it to operate according to natural laws. Most Deists thought Christianity was the truest religion, but thought what was valuable in Christianity could be arrived at by reason, and revelation was not really necessary.
- 3.3.4.2.** Deism tended to discount the importance of the historical events of Scripture and to deny the miraculous (since God chose not to intervene after He created the universe).
- 3.3.5. David Hume - the Critique of Empiricism**
- 3.3.5.1.** David Hume (1711-1776) denied the boundless confidence in reason he observed from the Deists and Empiricists. He thought that much of what the empiricists and deists affirmed as the product of reason could not actually be proven but was really simply the product of our normal mental habits. This included things such as cause and effect. This in turn called into question the “proofs” offered for the existence of God.
- 3.3.5.2.** Hume thus served to call into doubt even more of what had before been received as certain. This even included the certainty that God exists and that this can be learned from human reason.
- 3.3.6. Voltaire and Montesquieu**
- 3.3.6.1.** Voltaire and Montesquieu further challenged the surety of human reason. But a key idea they postulated dealt with human government. Their theories posited limited government. Montesquieu, in particular, stated that government should be broken into three branches that would balance one another: the executive, the legislative, and the judicial. These ideas were picked up in the American Revolution and the French Revolution.
- 3.3.7. Immanuel Kant**
- 3.3.7.1.** Kant (1724-1804) is considered one of the greatest philosophers of all time. He had been a firm rationalist until he was awakened from his “dogmatic slumber” by reading Hume.
- 3.3.7.2.** Kant taught that what we call “knowledge” is really the way our mind grasps and organizes the information received by our senses. Thus, there is really no such thing as “objective knowledge.” Thus, the “pure rationality” of the Cartesians, the Empiricists, and the Deists is really nothing more than an illusion.
- 3.3.7.3.** Kant’s work further undermined the traditional arguments for the existence of God and the truth of Christian doctrines. This does not mean they are not true - simply that they cannot be known by reason. They are not part of the world of fact and reason, but of faith.

3.4. All of these branches of the Enlightenment served to undermine confidence in traditional Christian doctrines and the reliability of revelation. Even though each of these groups arrived at conflicting understandings of the sure foundation for knowledge and the assured findings of human reason, together they elevated the confidence given to human reason and undermined the confidence people placed in Scripture and revelation.

#### 4. Summary

4.1. The intellectual and spiritual movements of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries further fragmented Europe and the West. As ideas became more and more refined, groups became more and more isolated from one another.

4.2. The growth of the Enlightenment began to erode the place of Christianity in Europe and beyond. This erosion would continue and grow right up until our own time.

4.3. Furthermore, the rival claims of the various branches of the church caused many to begin to question religious dogma and revelation. This ushered in the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason.

**Next Class: Colonial Expansion and the First Great Awakening**

**Reading: Chapters 24-25**

**Date: July 7**