

## HERESY AND CHURCH HISTORY

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Heresy has been defined, perhaps cynically, as an opinion held by a minority which the majority declares to be unacceptable and is powerful enough to punish. Heresy is also said to be a departure from orthodox Christian belief but how does one define what orthodoxy is?

No statement or creed exists that is common to all Christian belief and denominations. The ecumenical movement seeks to reverse the trend that existed when churches were interested in emphasising or maintaining their differences rather than pursuing unity.

As creeds do not embrace all the man-made variations of Christian belief, can the Bible state a definitive statement on all doctrine? It can and does but it is hampered by the fact that there are so many versions of the Bible and the interpretation of it. There is also the problem that some churches are not rooted in theology but in their own traditions and accordingly they interpret the Bible in the light of their own beliefs. To add to this, there are those who add to their traditions which, in itself, opens the way for divergences and distortions and also paves the way for heresy.

It must be remembered that one New Testament definition of heretic means a divisive, self-opinionated person who is producing his own party or sect and sometimes within an existing and established group.

There are Christians who have differing views... for example, the subject of baptism. Anglicans practise the baptism of infants whereas Baptists baptise adults on their personal confession of faith and by immersion. Does the Baptist call the Anglican a heretic?

Christians differ on the matter of the Second Coming. Do we say that someone who disagrees with us is a heretic? How do we establish a doctrinal statement that all Christians will agree to?

If a minority on some subject is shown to be right on a particular doctrine, then will they be classed as wrong because they do not conform to orthodoxy? The majority verdict does not necessarily make something factual.

I have heard Christians express orthodox doctrine in an unorthodox way and they have been called heretics.

Heresy can be defined as any doctrine that does not have Scriptural authorisation. If some held doctrine cannot be supported by Biblical doctrine this may be heresy.

Any doctrine away from the Bible is unorthodox.

It is a pity to note that the first heresy emanated from Christian Jews who stated that Gentile converts were not saved unless they were circumcised. Those who advocated this were called Judaizers. They wanted to incorporate Judaism into Christianity but the Council of Jerusalem in 49AD showed that Judaism could not be a part of Christianity. Paul makes it clear that Christianity is freedom from legalism.

There are two types of legalism which might be described as prevenient and resultant respectively. The former is given as a guide or a prop to an immature believer or body of believers. However, resultant legalism is when a man so loves God that he worships Him as God believing the God directs His life not any custom or ritual. Today, legalism is often used to define an arrogant and intransigence exclusiveness.

Heresies do not die but reappear in new guises. For example, the Seventh Day Adventists have replaced

the Judaizers of the first century. Adventists require their followers to keep the Sabbath, not Sunday, and to refrain from pig meat.

Another first century cult was the Gnostics who believed that they had a secret knowledge which was the key to salvation. Mormons have something that is similar.

The Gnostics believed that as God was good and the material world was evil, God could not have created the world. They also asserted that the planets influenced individuals and they practised magic. They were prophetically evolutionists, astrologists and psychics. Simon the sorcerer of Acts 8 was probably a Gnostic yet wanted to be baptised by Philip as a Christian. Writing about a century later, Justin Martyr said that Simon reneged and combined Gnostic elements with Christianity and also claimed that he was God stating that he came to save the world from angels who were misruling it.

Montanus started a movement when he claimed to have returned to the practices and beliefs of the primitive church and asserted, as do Pentecostals and charismatics of today, some 1750 years later, and stated that every Christian has to receive the second blessing and had to speak in tongues which is the evidence of receiving the Holy Spirit and being saved, thus reviving the wayward church at Corinth.

Montanists demanded celibacy, marriages being discountenanced and second marriages were absolutely forbidden thus foreshadowing Roman Catholicism in some aspects. Martyrdom was invited and any follower who took steps to avoid this was condemned. As his principal lieutenants, Montanus had two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, who caused much embarrassment as their prophecies, that is to say predictions, did not come true. Another woman claimed that Christ appeared as a woman anticipating by some 1600 years the female leader of the Shakers who prophesied that Christ would return as a woman.

Earliest Christianity was faced with the problem of the Trinity. The first problem was Christological rather than Trinitarian. Christ was a man but after His resurrection the disciples echoed with sincerity the words of Thomas, "My Lord and My God." Jewish Christians were strict monotheists and faced with the contemplation of Christ had two choices. Either Christ was a man especially chosen by God or He was God. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, from 177AD was a spiritual grandson of the apostles in that he had been taught by Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna who was acquainted with the apostle John and others who had personally known the Lord. Irenaeus taught that Christ was the Son of God who was the Eternal Word who became a person in the days of His flesh. However, Irenaeus was not clear and walked the tightrope between tritheism, the belief that God was three persons each with a separate body, and Unitarianism which believes that God can only be one mode at a time.

All this conflict led to Monarchianism which took two forms. The first, Dynamic Monarchianism expressed Jesus as an ordinary man born of the Virgin Mary and in this very plain man there existed an impersonal power issuing from God. Modalistic Monarchianism believed that God the Father suffered upon the Cross. The Sabellians believed that the Trinity were three modes or conditions of God. In other words, God could manifest Himself as Father, Son or Holy Spirit but only One at a time!

The other problem was one of semantics. Was God three persons? Was God in three persons? How could three persons constitute one God? How could God be three persons for that would mean three gods each with a separate body?

The origin of the word person in its correct meaning is of an actor's mask in which the actor in the contemporary theatre of the day had to play a part or several parts ranging from hero to villain. The actor was the same man but the characters he played were different and these characters were not himself.

God is not three persons or characters. The Father is God, the Eternal Word, who became flesh, is God

and the Holy Spirit is God. The Lord Jesus prayed to the Father to send the Holy Spirit. He did not pray to Himself to send Himself. The Bible makes it clear that the Father and the Spirit are Spirit Beings and that the bodily appearances of the Trinity are in the Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh.

Arius said that the Father alone was true God and that the Son was not co-eternal since if He is a Son then the Father must have existed before Him and co-eternity was not an option. Controversy reigned and Alexander, Bishop of Alexandria, called a synod of bishops and excommunicated Arius and his disciples but he had supporters both in Asia Minor and in Palestine and was given asylum by Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia. After much pressure, the Alexandrian decision was reversed and Arius rehabilitated.

The Emperor Constantine, who claimed to be a Christian, but was probably more concerned in keeping the Roman Empire together, called the first General or Ecumenical Council of the whole church which conference opened in Nicaea on 20 May 325. The small party of Arians were led by Eusebius who stated their case.

Alexander opposed the case and was supported by a young priest called Athanasius. The debate was about semantics and the council agreed to use the word *homoiousion* which means 'of like substance' and so, the Nicene creed describes Christ as 'the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father, that is to say of the substance with the Father, God from God, Light from Light, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father.'

In 350, an extreme form of Arianism was put forward. Aetius, a deacon at Antioch, taught that the Son was *anomoios* that is to say totally different from the Father, fallible and capable of sin. This followed on from a scandal shortly after the Council of Nicaea when the opposing factions accused each other of adultery and on the word of a prostitute! In fact, from about 326, a regular campaign against Nicene bishops was conducted, a dozen being deposed including Athanasius. To think that Christians, so-called, unable to win their case, would stoop to publicly attack the character of those with whom they disagree is the height of contempt and, even in our time, it is still done.

The Nicene Creed established Trinitarians. It stated that God was not three persons but One. The Father was not a different God from the Son or the Spirit. Father, Son and Spirit were distinct from each other but of one substance and constituted one God.

Appollinarius, Bishop of Laodicea, was a faithful ally of Athanasius and a tutor of Jerome, translator of the Vulgate.

Appollinarius was faced with two problems concerning the Trinity. How could Jesus be both human and Divine with the possibility that His human side, if truly human, could sin? He was troubled by the use of the word *person* in describing the members of the Trinity and how to describe Christ's nature. If Christ had an entire human nature including intelligence and was, at the same time God, then He must have within Him two complete and contending natures. This would make Him neither God nor man but a hybrid. He concluded that Christ was clothed in flesh but not completely a man, a hybrid and therefore His humanity was not the same as ours. These beliefs were known as Appollinarianism.

An important fifth century heresy was Nestorianism. Nestorius taught that God dwelt in Christ as the son of a man and his wife. This took away from the character of Christ. Nestorius implied that the Virgin Mary in giving birth to the Son of God was therefore the Mother of God and therefore a goddess to be worshipped or, at least to be prayed to, and this is the position of the Roman Catholic Church today. The teaching went further that Christ not only had two natures, human and Divine, but was two persons. This highlights the confusion with the word *person* which word prudent Christians should dispense with.

In about 447, opposition to Nestorianism broke out in a series of disputes. Eutyches, who was responsible for a monastery of 300 monks near Constantinople, said that Christ was the same substance with the Father but not of the same substance as a man. Consequently, Eutyches was dismissed from his priestly office and excommunicated as a reviler of Christ. While he emphasised the Divinity of Christ he was confused in that he said that God was not in Christ and that the Passion was merely an individual human being suffered. There was nothing Divine in it thus making the atonement of no relevance to humanity. This devalued Christ. Unless the Lord is of the same nature as humanity, co-substantial with it, He could not be the 'second Adam' nor could mankind follow the example of His life any more than the life of a Greek god or an angel. This was Eutychianism.

In 449, a council was held by order of the Emperor, Theodosius II, to determine the case. It was packed with Eutyches' partisans nicknamed the Latrocinium or Robbers Council. Flavian, Bishop of Constantinople endured aggressive intimidation. Pope Leo's book known as The Tome of Leo with its anti-Eutychian views was refused a hearing and some witnesses were forbidden to attend. The council gave its allegiance to the creed of Nicaea. Leo was excommunicated, Flavian deposed and others punished. They appealed and, in 451, the Fourth Ecumenical Council met at Chalcedon and the proceedings of the Robbers Council annulled.

Appollinarianism, Nestorianism and Eutychianism were condemned and the Lord Jesus was declared to be 'perfect in Godhead and manhood, truly God and truly man and of the same substance with us according to His manhood yet without sin, begotten of the Father before all time yet in these latter days for us and for our salvation born of the Virgin Mary... He being of one substance not being parted or separated into two persons but one and the same God...'

From the time of Constantine and the Nicaea Council of 325, the Roman Empire and the church had combined. Church and State to some extent have been combined ever since. That, in itself, seems heretical as Christ is said to be the Head of the Church not the Emperor, the Pope or a Monarch. History is replete with the State giving lip service to the Church and the Church compromising to obey the dictates of the State.

Certain 'safeguards' were developed over the next 200 years against heresy and what was set up was the claim of Apostolic Succession...that is to say the assumption that the disciple Peter was the first Pope and the laying on of hands, or consecration of his successors was continued. In other words, Peter approved his successors.

Another dubious doctrine was that of the infallibility of the Pope which, although it did not become Catholic dogma until 1870, had existed for centuries.

There was a struggle for power and leadership between the Roman and Greek churches until the eleventh century.

Since the establishment of the Papacy with the Bishop of Rome being the Holy Roman Emperor, all that he and his followers said was deemed orthodox. While it was asserted that God was over all He ruled through His vicar on earth, the Pope, who was the head of the church. The power and authority of the Scriptures were now, both in faith and in practice, subservient to the interpretation and rules of the Pope.

Another dispute commenced at the end of the fourth century when Pelagius, thought to be a British monk, went to Rome in 390 and introduced a controversy which still exists today. This dispute concerned predestination versus freewill. He denied the doctrine of original sin saying that Adam did not bequeath to his descendants a sinful nature but merely set a bad example. He believed that man could live without sin by training the will... indeed God's grace could now be man's nature and freewill could be maintained with its sin-resistant potentiality.

Pelagius's greatest opponent was Augustine (354-430), Bishop of Hippo who said that at creation evil did not exist but that Adam's sin, original sin, has consequently been transmitted to all mankind although Adam could have remained sinless but for his freewill and pride. Augustine believed that even the infant dying at birth is guilty of inherent sin hence his advocacy of infant baptism which washed away original sin.

An Irish lawyer called Coelestius was a follower of Pelagius and they propagated the idea that every child is born in the state of Adam before the Fall and that man can keep God's commandments if he chooses, and that some men before the time of Christ were sinless!

When Pelagius arrived in Palestine he aroused the hostility of Jerome but a synod at Jerusalem took no action over the Pelagianists heresy. Local church councils at Carthage and Mileve condemned it confirming the edict of Pope Innocent I but, upon his death, Pelagius appealed to his successor, Zozimus who declared Pelagius blameless. However, Emperor Honorius declared Pelagius and Coelestius heretics and liable to punishment. Eighteen bishops would not condemn the heretics and lost their sees. Britain, in their usual attitude of patriotism, adopted the heresy.

Augustinism hardened under controversy into the matter of predestination that it is to say the doctrine that God has chosen all who are to be saved and all who are to be lost before time despite any individual's efforts, devotion, good works which would be in vain since God had elected to withhold His grace from them. These ideas were to be maintained by the French theologian Jean Calvin who was born in 1509. These beliefs are opposed to New Testament teaching that God is not willing that any should perish but that all may come to a knowledge of all the truth.

It has been said that all religious activity performed solely from a sense of duty rather than personal devotion to God is Pelagian since it suggests that heaven can be won by human effort.

Schism is not heresy since it may be necessary to leave a local church because of its teaching, practices and personnel. People do leave churches because they are misunderstood, badly treated and rightly refuse to be manipulated or because doctrines are dubious and changing to meet current trends. People leave churches because their privacy is not respected under the guise of others wanting to have fellowship.

The iconoclastic quarrel which tore the church apart between 726 to 843 concerned the wish to destroy all representations in sculpture and paintings of images of Christ and the saints so as not to break the second commandment, 'Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image.'

A council in Chalcedon in 754 condemned the use of such images, a decree supported by the edict of Constantine V which said that offenders would be punished as heretics.

Different dates are given for the Great Schism between Rome and Constantinople leading to the establishment of two groups, the Roman Catholics and the Greek Orthodox. The reasons were not Christian but those of expediency and politics although there were differences about Christ Himself and purgatory.

At the beginning of the eleventh century, Tanchelmus from Antwerp preached against Rome as to its constitution denying its authority and that of the Pope. He was imprisoned by the Archbishop of Cologne and killed after escaping from him in 1115.

Contemporary with Tanchelmus was Abelard born about 1079 who developed into being a devout and sensitive individual but he was somewhat arrogant with his habit of defeating his elders and teachers in debates. His doctrine on the atonement said that as God have forgiven him before Christ came, the satisfaction made by Christ on the Cross was not necessary for the forgiveness of sins, and that men

should see in Christ what they should be themselves and because they were conscious of their sins and their love for God would inspire good living.

Bernard of Clairvaux regarded this as subversive to faith and in 1140 caused Abelard to be convicted of heresy. Although he appealed to Rome, Abelard was excommunicated.

The Waldenses were founded by Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant of Lyons. They were mostly simple and illiterate men and women imitating the disciples by going out in pairs and existing on what charitable people gave them. They were known as the Poor People of Lyons and in their preaching attacked Papal corruption stating that any genuine Christian could preach and administer the sacraments. Masses, prayers for the dead, indulgencies, confessions, penance, church music, chanting of prayers, prayers in Latin and the adoration of saints were rejected. They apparently felt that they could absolve from sin and their ministers renounced marriage and property.

Waldo was refused recognition by the Third Lateran Council in 1179 and in 1184 was excommunicated.

The fact that most of his teaching, but not all, was nearer to the Bible than Catholic teaching counted for nothing in his time.

Some Waldenses were burned at the stake in Strasbourg as early as 1212. In 1393 at Grenoble, 350 were burned to death in a single day.

How could Catholics, who claim to be Christians, murder ex-Catholics in the Name of God and in such a horrific way? The Catholic Church was intolerant to any variation of their beliefs and still today there may be some who are harsh even within their own church to those who will not conform to the party line or serve those in power over them.

Yet another heresy of the time was that of the Cathari who taught that evil was responsible for the creation of the world; that God had two sons, one of whom was Satan who rebelled, the other being Christ the Redeemer.

Man, tricked by evil, was thrust into a material world created by the bad God. Some believed that marriage was more evil than adultery and the incarnation of Christ was impossible as such matter was evil. Christ was neither man nor God and His Birth, physical life, death and resurrection were all illusions.

Yet the Cathari believed that they were Christians but did not employ crosses or crucifixes in worship and thus further incensed the Catholic Church who waged a crusade against them between 1223 and 1270.

The most notorious event was the Inquisition which began about 1184 when the Catholic Emperor, Frederick Barbarossa tried to outlaw the punishment of heretics, but Pedro of Aragon instituted death at the stake for heresy. Pope Innocent IV (1243- 54) added the use of torture and that it be administered by a secular authority. Any suspect, however distinguished or powerful, once hauled before the Inquisition was judged guilty. Any advocate or witness acting on his behalf laid themselves open to abetting a heretic. No one was ever acquitted. Sentences were rendered at Sunday High Mass. If a heretic repented at the last minute, he was given a life sentence.

Whatever justification is raised there is absolutely none for these Catholic acts of appalling cruelty which were certainly not Christian. These Catholics were the heretics.

In 1324, Marsilio of Padua wrote *Defensor Pacis* a work implicitly condemning persecution for heresy. That same year John Wycliffe was born. He was a brilliant scholar at Oxford. He attacked the wealth

of the bishops and clergy maintaining that they should live on voluntary offerings and that all property belonged to God. He also said that Popes could and did make mistakes and that, therefore, since a Pope could make mistakes and be a heretic, such a man must be removed from office by a layman, if necessary. He rejected the dominion of the Pope and the church, and adhered to the New Testament teaching of the priesthood of all believers. He saw no necessity for confirmation and denied the teaching of transubstantiation. He repudiated indulgences, masses for the dead and the cults of saints, relics and pilgrimages. He believed the Bible to be the supreme authority under God and translated it into the vernacular. His followers became known as Lollards, from a Middle English word meaning a mumblor of prayers. Wycliffe died peacefully in 1384.

It was only seventeen years later that Henry IV followed the continental powers by making the stake the legal penalty for heresy. In 1401, an Act was passed and many Lollards suffered. This was, quite frankly, Catholic terrorism.

If Wycliffe was the beginning of the English Reformation, John Hus was the equivalent in Bohemia. He had been ordained a priest and become Dean of Prague University. He opposed Papal supremacy. It was Christ who was the Rock not Peter and succeeding Popes; the Church was built upon Christ, the Rock of Ages, not Peter of the Apostolic Succession and the laws of Christ overruled all the ordinances of men. Hus's condemnation of indulgences alienated the theological faculty of the University of Prague and bought about his ex-communication. He was burned at the stake on 6 July 1415 but his followers, the Hussites, quietly continued evangelical preaching.

On 30 July 1430, Joan of Arc was burned as a sorceress and a heretic yet on 18 April 1909 the Roman Catholic Church canonised her which is possibly the only case of a convicted and executed heretic being given this honour.

Martin Luther was born on 10 November 1483 at Eisleben in Upper Saxony, the eldest of seven children in an orthodox Catholic family. He took his MA in 1505 but, while on a country walk, was felled by lightning which experience led him to vow to become a monk. He was ordained a priest in 1507 but a business trip to Rome in 1510 distressed him because he saw for himself the corruption of the Pope and the clergy. On his return he became Doctor of Divinity at Wittenberg although he felt uneasy about some Catholic doctrine. To him predestination made God out to be fickle and Luther's thinking led him to realise that salvation was not in being a member of the Church but in accepting Jesus Christ as Saviour who died to save sinners who were justified by faith in Him.

On 31 October 1517, Luther nailed his ninety five theses on the church door at Wittenberg in which he attacked indulgences stating that salvation could not be purchased; that the price paid for indulgences could not save or improve anyone's prospect of heaven. The head of the Church was Christ and Christ alone. The church was not a building or an organisation but the invisible body of all true believers consisting of all those who are justified by faith. The Pope, cardinals, bishops and other dignitaries of the Roman church had no rights to the temporal or spiritual powers claimed by them. Monastic life was no better than the ordinary living of any Christian, and monastic vows had no Scriptural authority. The supreme authority for every Christian and each church was and is the Bible not the Pope or anybody else. Luther went on to say that many Popes were not even believers and that every believer is a priest and should learn to be competent to understand and rightly interpret the Bible.

He further said that the mode for baptism was total immersion for believers who made a personal confession of faith. He attacked the Pope's pomp and luxury and urged the states of Germany to refuse to pay Papal taxes and to abolish all rights of the Papacy to interfering German ecclesiastical and temporal affairs and to expel Papal legates from Germany.

The fact that Luther's interpretation was Biblically sound exposed Roman Catholic doctrine to be false.

The availability of the printing press enabled Luther's writings to circulate in Germany and in other countries. The Pope realised that he had a serious opponent.

On 15 June 1529, a Papal bull was issued condemning forty one of Luther's 'errors' and ordered the burning of any books and writings that contained them.

Luther was ordered to recant within sixty days. He refused and was saved from death by political considerations and expediency.

The Reformation had arrived and entered the religious arena.

Lutheranism flourished for a time in Germany and it was seen to be nationalistic.

It had more credence than Rome and Italy. King Frederick of Denmark became a Protestant and, as Christian III, ruled Denmark from 1543 to 1559, the country becoming fully Lutheran. Catholic bishops were arrested and their property confiscated. Christian III was also monarch of Norway and Sweden and Lutheranism spread in these countries as well. The new denomination reached the Baltic and Iceland. In Bohemia many had followed the teaching of Hus but the majority of Slavs followed Calvinism.

But Luther was racist and wrote some dreadful things about the Jews.

Huldreich Zwingli was born into a prosperous Swiss home in 1484. By his thirties he was circulating Luther's writings stressing the authority of the Scriptures and, more radically, rejecting everything in the Roman Catholic Church which had no Biblical support.

In 1520, the Zurich civil authorities decreed that priests should freely preach what conformed to the Scriptures. By Easter 1525, Zurich churches were empty of images, relics and organs; Mass was replaced by a simple service centring on the sermon. The property of dissolved monasteries was given to schools.

Jean Calvin was reared in France in the manner of an aristocrat. He went to the University of Paris and had a religious experience.

He and his followers advocated the five points of Calvinism. Firstly, the total depravity of man; secondly, unconditional election which harks back to the predestination debates stating that God has chosen and elected who is to be saved and who is to be damned; thirdly, limited atonement by which is meant that Christ only died for a particular number whom He choose before the foundation of the world; fourthly, irresistible grace which means that if God has already chosen to save you He calls you and you cannot refuse. Finally, the perseverance of saints which means that you cannot be saved and then lost since the believer gives all diligence to make his election sure.

Calvin also advocated that there were only two sacraments namely baptism and the Lord's Supper and that the church was not a viable institution or organisation but all the elect, alive and dead.

Not only was his doctrine wrong, since the New Testament states that all can be saved, but his personality and conduct was thoroughly unpleasant. He was hard and intolerant. He dismissed the Protestant scholar, Sebastian Castello (1515-63) because he questioned the interpretation of the Song of Solomon and disagreed with Calvin as to the meaning of Christ's descent into Hell. Michael Servetus (1511-53) rejected Calvinism and the teaching both on predestination and election and believed in the millennial reign of Christ. He was condemned as a heretic in the Catholic city of Vienna but given safe conduct to escape to Geneva. However, he was recognised and came into contact with Calvin and there were exchanges of charges and counter charges of heresy.

Servetus was charged with heresy. Had he been acquitted Calvin's power in Geneva would have collapsed.

Calvin insisted that Servetus be sentenced to death although he apparently pleaded for a merciful death than that at the stake. Calvin was cruel and vicious and did not have the spirit of Christ.

These killings, executions or whatever they may be called are totally unjustified and certainly not Christian. And Calvin's resultant Presbyterianism therefore had a bad start!

John Knox (1505-72) fled from Mary, Queen of Scots, who was an ardent Roman Catholic. In Geneva, he imbibed Calvinism and returned to Scotland in 1556 and, by 1561, a version of the Reformed Faith became the official form of Scottish Christianity.

Refusal to acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope was regarded as heresy as was anything that was against Catholic teaching.

Long before the Reformation, English life had poured scorn on aspects of Catholicism and its shortcomings. There was concubinage among the clergy, simony, absentee clerics having 'soft' lives on the revenues of their benefices, or livings, the idleness and ignorance of some monks, nuns and friars, the preoccupation of the higher clergy with the affairs of State, which all weakened the Church in the eyes of the laity.

The work of Luther had not gone unnoticed in England and stirred the embers of Lollardy.

One Cambridge scholar, Thomas Bilney, who taught Hugh Latimer, was burned at the stake for Lutheran heresy.

William Tyndale, a priest educated at Oxford translated the New Testament into English and was executed by strangulation in the Netherlands in 1536. One of his followers, Miles Coverdale, translated the Bible in 1535.

It was Henry VIII's first marriage that caused England to break with Rome. Catherine of Aragon was unable to provide a male heir which was regarded as essential to safeguard the English throne thereby causing Henry to seek a divorce. There were intrigues on both sides of the ensuing debate and, in 1529, Thomas Cranmer, suggested that the King's case should be put before the universities of Europe to adjudicate. Henry indicted the clergy as a body under the ancient law of praemunire which sought law suits being taken out of England into the Papal courts.

In 1532, Parliament transferred the payments of annates from the Pope to the King's coffers, who became recognised as Head of the Church in England.

The following year, Henry bigamously and secretly married the pregnant Anne Boleyn. The Pope excommunicated Henry declaring his marriage to Catherine to be the real one.

Thomas Cromwell, the king's general in ecclesiastical matters, caused the English Bible to be set up in every church for the laity to read. This was in 1536 and was followed by the monasteries being dissolved. In 1549, during the reign of Edward VI, an Act of Uniformity was passed enforcing the Book of Common Prayer on all the clergy. When Mary came to the throne in 1553, she revived Catholicism and Catholic bishops were restored. She had 282 Protestants burned at the stake including Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley, together with a large number of women.

Henry in declaring himself to Head of the Church in England and Ireland and Elisabeth's Act of Uniformity meant that the Irish had to grapple with the unfamiliar English language.

Elisabeth I tried a middle road to keep in favour with both the Pope and Protestants. In her reign, the 39 articles of faith of the Church of England were produced and Protestant power grew. Consequently, the Pope excommunicated Elisabeth.

The Spanish Armada of 1588 is often taught in schools as England being at war with Spain. It was an attempt of Catholic Spain to conquer the English and impose Roman Catholicism upon the English by warfare, cruelty and torture.

Other movements of note in the sixteenth century included Arminianism.

Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) asserted that God had given man freewill and that this therefore conflicted with predestination and his rejection of Calvinism which preached limited atonement. Arminius stated that God foresees who is going to accept Christ as Saviour rather than make random choices, or elections, before the beginning of time and that God does not ordain the loss of any sinner. This teaching conforms with the New Testament. Predestination refers to believers being conformed to Christ.

The Society of Jesus was founded by Ignatius Loyola (c 1491-1556) who vowed to do whatever the Pope wished and to go wherever it was necessary to rid by any means any land of heretics, that is to say, non-Catholics. His society became known as the Jesuits and was noted for its military might, terrorism and cruelty.

Another matter to briefly note was the rise of Anabaptists who correctly taught adult baptism but had many forms of mysticism.

The eighteenth century was known as the age of enlightenment where religion came under attack and that science now established that miracles do not happen! There was no such thing as original sin and man could be perfect if governed by reason.

Another sect that came into being around 1750 were the Universalists who rejected Trinitarian doctrine, denied the Fall and said that everyone would finally be saved.

Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a mystical Sabellian asserting that Father and Son were a single person revealed in different ways.

John Wesley (1703-91) was ordained in the Church of England and went as a missionary to new American colonies in Georgia. At a subsequent meeting in London, he was 'strangely warmed' and began a revival campaign in the Church of England. He was joined later by George Whitfield (1714-80). Open air preaching was established with great effect and there were Bible Class meetings for converts.

Wesley began the Methodist movement which became a denomination of its own in 1795. They were Lutheran generally in their beliefs and Arminian in their doctrine of grace. Purgatory and conversion after death was rejected and the phrase 'He descended into Hell' was omitted from the creed. Infant baptism was retained and the main preaching was on the doctrine of grace and the need of everyone to personally accept Christ as Saviour.

An Adventist sect appeared in the 1760s and was known as the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming or Shakers as they were popularly known. Their Leader, Anna Lee, was convinced that the greatest evil in the world was sex. As with the Camisards in France they had a fondness for speaking in tongues with bodily movements and gestures known as shakings. They organised colonies in America and 'danced in the Spirit'. In this, they revived Montanism and were the precursors of the Pentecostal and charismatic movements. The leaders of the Shakers were always women and many believed that Christ would return as a woman. This was feminism.

The nineteenth century was greatly influenced by scientific 'progress' and the propagation of such theories as evolution. To incorporate advances in science and knowledge into religious belief led to what was called Modernism and Liberal Theology.

Evangelicals resisted this and a great distance resulted between the established church and evangelicals.

There were revival campaigns of American Missioners such as Charles Finney, Dwight L Moody and Ira Sankey. The Keswick Convention in Cumbria began in 1875 to 'deepen the spiritual life'.

What became known as the Plymouth Brethren began in the late 1820s in Dublin. They believed in the simple approach to worship. The Bible was the sole rule of faith; baptism was by immersion for believers upon their personal confession of faith and there was a breaking of bread service on Sunday mornings. There were no ministers but each assembly had its own elders responsible to God for the spiritual welfare of its flock. In 1840 there was the first of many schisms leading to Exclusive Brethren and Open Brethren. Exclusives fractured into many variations and jealousy and intolerance has beset this movement ever since. However, there can be no doubt as to their allegiance to Scriptures and basic sincerity and the closest they have arrived at basic truth.

Joseph Smith (1805-44) claimed to have been visited by the angel Moroni in New York State in 1823 who gave him gold plates on which was written the book of Mormon. He also received a pair of special spectacles to enable him to decipher the plates which claimed that the Red Indians were the ten lost tribes of Israel to whom Christ appeared after His resurrection.

In 1829, Smith and a colleague asserted that they had been ordained by John the Baptist who descended from heaven for this occasion. Brigham Young (1801-77) became the leader of this movement and guided persecuted converts to Salt Lake City in Utah. Polygamy was officially introduced in 1852, three wives being the necessary qualification for higher ecclesiastical office. Young taught that God the Father had a body of flesh and bones and had, in fact, been a man in order to advance into being God. To this Church of the Latter Day saints salvation is only found in the Mormon Church.

Edward Irving, a Presbyterian preacher, became a charismatic because he believed in the speaking in tongues. He founded the Catholic Apostolic Church and advocated that Christ would return to earth in 1835. To his critics, his church appeared to be bedlam. The year 1835 passed without the Second Advent and Irving prophesied further dates as 1838, 1842, 1852, 1833 and 1877. He was excommunicated from the Presbyterian Church for heresy. Clearly he foreshadowed the Pentecostal and charismatic churches with their emphasis of the baptism in/with/by the Holy Spirit, tongues, a pyramid hierarchy of apostles, prophets, bishops, elders, pastors and deacons.

In 1870 a Pennsylvanian, Charles Taze Russell (1852-1916) fixed the date of Christ's return as 1874. This being proved to be wrong caused Russell to become hostile to existing churches. He formed the Jehovah Witnesses or The Watchtower Society. He asserted that Christ would return in 1914 and that 144,000 witnesses were taken to heaven but some remained on earth as they alone are God's sole representatives. To them, Christ is God's son in the Arian sense, a mere creature who became the Messiah after His baptism. There is no Trinitarian doctrine and all opponents to Jehovah Witnesses will be annihilated.

William Booth founded the Salvation Army in London with its admirable devotion to the poor and needy. The Army believes in the Trinity, the necessity of conversion and in the atonement through the death of Christ. Its ethos is puritan eschewing alcohol and tobacco and demands followers to be obedient to the Army. You must follow the flag. The two ordinances of breaking of bread and baptism are not followed. The use of brass bands, marching, open air work are features of this movement. However, there are many who do not approve of Christians having ranks such as General or Soldier and that uniforms have no Biblical support.

Christian Science is the group formed by Mary Baker Eddy (1828-1910). She was really a spiritualist and married three times. The doctrine of the Trinity was rejected and forgiveness of sins was merely an illusion as is illness, pain and even death.

Spiritualism thrived about this time and seems to have its origin in America among women. It became popular because it relieved the anguish of those bereaved by alleged communications with the benevolent spirits of loved ones who 'had passed on'. There are other beliefs and practices to consider but not in the scope of this article.

The most significant movement of the twentieth century is the Pentecostal/charismatic movement with its emphasis on the second blessing which is the baptism in/with/ by the Holy Spirit evidenced by the speaking in tongues or prophesy foretelling a future event. Many go as far as to say that if you do not speak in tongues you are not saved. Meetings attracted mostly simple people with its unsophisticated, anti-liturgical, free and undisciplined, noisy, emotional forms of worship.

In 1918, Aimee Semple MacPherson settled in Los Angeles and brought in the Four Square Gospel, a razzmatazz style of revival meetings both vulgar and vigorous. She was a consummate showman gaining as much publicity in the 1920s and 1930s as any Hollywood film star. Her life was marked by lawsuits over many alleged love affairs and shortly before her suicide she instructed her followers to put a telephone in her coffin so she could communicate with God.

The Assemblies of God is probably the largest Pentecostal Church. Of a similar family is the Dolly Pond Church of God with Signs Following which follows the charismatic 'gift' of handling dangerous snakes believing that they will come to no harm. The movement was founded in Tennessee by George West Hensley in 1909.

He died in 1955 of a snake bite!

Other followers suffered the same fate.

The House Church Movement is growing rapidly. It is charismatic and of the entertainment-evangelism type developed from the Elim people. They have a freedom of worship in which anything goes and which is comfortable and undemanding. The charismatic position is often declared as the Full Gospel and the Full Gospel Business Men's Association advocates this. Their founder was apparently found guilty of fraud and some members said that they had died, gone to heaven and come back to preach the only true doctrine which is Pentecostal and charismatic.

Many charismatics have achieved notoriety for dishonesty and immorality and for being frauds!

This history is distressing and, perhaps, one could be forgiven for having no faith!

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