

ENGLISH REFORMATION

MODERN CHURCH HISTORY –SPRING 2024

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

- When the Pope refused to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, King Henry VIII declared himself Supreme Head of the Church of England in 1534, severing ties with Rome.
- Henry dissolved monasteries and seized their assets, significantly impacting the church's structure and wealth.
- In practice, the Church of England was not much different from the Catholic Church. Influenced by Luther and Calvin, a group of reformers within the church began to challenge their theology and practices. They became known as “Puritans”.
- King James I initially showed some tolerance towards Puritans, authorizing the translation of the King James Bible. However, he later became increasingly intolerant, enforcing religious uniformity and persecuting dissenters.
- England became intolerant of the Puritans, forcing many of them to flee to America in pursuit of religious freedom.
- Notable Puritan writers include John Milton (*Paradise Lost*), John Bunyan (*Pilgrim’s Progress*), and Mary Rowlandson (*The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*).

SYNOD OF DORT

- A major Council of the Dutch Reformed Church was held in 1618-1619 to settle the theological debate between Calvinism and Arminianism.
- The Synod condemned Arminianism as heretical and published the Canon of Dort – five statements summarizing Calvinist theology (TULIP).
- Arminians were expelled from the Dutch Reformed Church and faced political persecution for a time.

WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

- From 1643-1653, a large group of English pastors and parliament members met to define the theology and practices of the Church.
- They published 4 documents: a Confession of Faith, a Larger and Shorter Catechism, and a Directory of Public Worship.

- These reforms were not adopted by the Church of England, but instead had a profound impact on Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.

CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

- Heavily influenced by John Calvin, John Knox advocated for a radical break with the Catholic Church. He led the Scottish Reformation in 1560.
- The Scottish Parliament, influenced by the Protestant movement, passed legislation outlawing the Catholic Mass and establishing a Presbyterian church structure. This sparked armed conflict with supporters of the Catholic Queen Mary.
- After Mary's abdication, the Treaty of Edinburgh in 1567 secured Protestant dominance in Scotland for a season and paved the way for further consolidation of the reformed church.
- The English Civil War led to violent conflict between Presbyterians and the Church of England until the Glorious Revolution established religious freedom. The Presbyterian rebels became known as Covenanters.
- This struggle left a lasting mark on Scottish history and identity. Their commitment to religious freedom and self-governance resonated with later democratic movements and contributed to the shaping of Scottish national consciousness.

PIETISM

- Pietism arose within the Lutheran Church during the 17th century as a reaction to what some perceived as its growing intellectual coldness and focus on theological arguments.
- Philipp Spener and August Hermann Francke emphasized a more personal and experiential approach to faith, with practices like Bible study, prayer, and small group meetings.
- The movement spread to other Protestant denominations, including Methodists, Moravians, and Baptists, shaping their practices and theology.
- Pietist emphasis on education and social outreach led to the founding of schools, orphanages, and social organizations.

Do you see the impact of any of these historical influences in churches today? In our church?

From Tim Keller, “What’s So Great About the PCA?”:

The doctrinalist impulse puts the emphasis on the corporate and the objective. The stress is on ministry done through church courts—Session, Presbytery, and General Assembly- and on people being brought to Christ through objective ordinances and processes like baptism and catechism. It takes a dim view of most para-church agencies and inter-denominational cooperation. There is more stress on uniformity of faith and practice than on freedom and diversity. Historic tradition is valued over innovation, and social adaptation is looked upon with great suspicion. These last two factors mean there is less freedom for individual Christians and local Sessions. Things are more tightly regulated.

The pietist impulse puts the emphasis on the individual and the experiential. Pietists do ministry through church courts, but they are also supportive of ministry through para-church ministries. Pietists stress core doctrines over secondary ones, and feel more like part of the broader evangelical movement than do doctrinalists. This branch, like the doctrinalists, are generally suspicious of an emphasis on social justice and cultural engagement. While the doctrinalists fear cultural accommodation, the pietists are more afraid that it will detract from the pietists’ main concern—evangelism, mission, and church growth.

The culturalist impulse is like the doctrinalist in that it values theological reasoning and is suspicious of the individualism and pragmatism of the pietists. Culturalists emphasize community and the corporate in ways similar to the doctrinalists. However, culturalists are more like the pietists in their openness to social adaptation. Indeed, they usually are more open to the ‘new’ than the pietists. And the culturalists pay the most attention to what goes on outside the church in the culture. In particular, they usually give more heed to modern scholarship. Culturalists may show less concern with ‘church growth’ and overt evangelistic programs than either of the other two branches. Also feel more affinity to ‘the Great Tradition’—the Anglican, Catholic, and Eastern churches—than do the doctrinalists and the pietists.

I believe that all the critiques of the various branches are right. The doctrinalist branch can breed smugness and self-righteousness over its purity, and develop almost an Old Testament concern for ceremonial cleanness—namely, that we must not only not promote views that are suspect, but we must not associate with people who do.

The pietistic branch is very pragmatic and results-oriented, and it is resistant to enter into processes of discipline or theological debate, even when that is what is required. The pietist branch also tends to give too much credence to pastors who grow their churches large.

The culturalist branch becomes too enamored with modern scholarship, and there are plenty of historical examples of how the emphasis on social engagement and justice has led to the erosion of orthodox theology. Neither the culturalists nor the doctrinalists have a good track record of vigorous evangelism.

When it comes to culture, the doctrinalists are deeply concerned by any effort to ‘contextualize’ yet are often blind to how accommodated they are to previous cultures (17th century British Puritanism or 16th century European Protestantism, or 19th century Southern Presbyterianism.) The pietists are often blind to how accommodated they are to capitalism and popular culture, while the culturalists are often unaware of how captured they are by elite, contemporary culture.