

“Church History: Heroes, Heretics & Holy Wars”

Sunday School Notes

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CLASS 18 – Secularization, Liberalism, and Fundamentalism

Mormonism

1830 *Book of Mormon* published. Joseph Smith received his vision from the angel giving him the Golden Tablets of the 3rd Testament. A uniquely American religion, it taught that the Trinity is three separate beings, marriage is so important that men should take more than 1 wife (dropped later on), baptisms for the dead, Christ had come to America and the Native Americans were related to the 10 lost tribes of Israel. Smith was lynched by an angry mob in Indiana, but his followers settled in Utah and began sending out missionaries. > 9 million adherents.

De-Christianization of Europe

1776 – Declaration of Independence; the American Revolution inspired radicals all over Europe

1789 – Storming of the Bastille & Declaration of Rights; French Revolution

Historians mark the storming of the Bastille and the French Revolution as the beginning of the “Age of Progress.” The Bastille was seen as the symbol of the Old Regime: repressive powers that included monarchs, wealthy aristocrats, and the Church. The new age would be the age of the common man. Humanity would progress, man was glorified over God. The French Revolution said: “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.” For the 1790s there was much hostility towards the Catholic church in France, with priests sent into hiding and churches converted to “Temples of Reason.” But when Napoleon came to power, he worked out an agreement with the Pope – the Concordat of 1801 – that restored the Church as the “religion of the great majority of Frenchmen.” But the church had lost much of its power.

And Christianity in Europe was on a slow decline to near death over the next few centuries!

Cultural Shocks for Christian America in mid-19th century:

-1859 – Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*. Difficult to reconcile w/Bible’s account of creation.

-Industrialization and immigration made big cities and brought many people to the big cities who didn’t share the Protestant faith.

-Higher criticism of the Bible, started in Europe, especially Germany. Moses didn’t write the Pentateuch? Jesus wasn’t the Son of God?

Karl Marx (1818-1883) – Communism rejected theism; religion is an opiate for the masses.

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) – God is dead.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855)

Born into an affluent Danish family, studied at the University of Copenhagen, Kierkegaard’s father wanted him to be a priest but he was a perpetual student; wealthy enough never to have to work. After a broken engagement, he started writing philosophy, questioning the assumptions of his day under pseudonyms. In the mid-1850s he turned his pen toward the church, criticizing it for neglecting to teach about Christ and for its love of money, power, and its own structures. Religion needs to tell us how to live and God is a living, active Being and we can’t meet Him through reason alone. We must have a passionate commitment to God in the face of uncertainty. The greatest

enemy of Christianity is Christendom – the respectable Christianity that keeps people from truly experiencing God. The church seems to just be playing at Christianity, but true Christianity had to be costly. People picked him up in the 20th century and expanded on his themes, some in a good way towards more faithful churches and others in a bad way, turning him into the father of existentialism.

Abraham Kuyper (1837 – 1920)

Dutch - Though raised in a Christian home that believed the Bible to be inerrant, when Abraham Kuyper went to college he lost his faith in the Bible, and joined the liberal consensus against miracles, the deity of Christ, and the rejection of anything in the Bible that could not be proved by modern science. After getting his doctorate of divinity, he was sent to a country church where he encountered very godly people who believed the Bible. He would argue theology with them, and was eventually won over and thankful that his parishioners were patient with him. He had a huge passion and energy to teach the Bible and refute liberal ideology that he had been teaching.

Later he ministered in Amsterdam, where he challenged Christians to become politically active. He joined the Christian reform party, the Antirevolutionary Party. After many years he was elected to Parliament, then eventually was made Prime Minister, a position he held for 4 years. He also helped start the Free University, called Free because it was not under the control of Parliament or the liberal state church. This was the first independent university in Holland, and he taught theology.

Kuyper's most famous quote: "In all of human life there is not a square inch of which Christ, who alone is sovereign, does not declare, "That is Mine." (He taught "sphere sovereignty" – that the family, the church and the state have their own sphere that they operate in.)

LIBERALISM

Richard Niebuhr said that liberalism presents "a God without wrath (who) brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross."

Liberals believed that faith had to pass the test of reason and experience, not accepted on the basis of authority alone. Man's mind was capable of thinking God's thoughts after Him.

Biblical Higher Critics:

(Lower criticism= dealing with problems of the text, weighing merits of many manuscripts to find the most reliable text of Scripture; Higher criticism= determining when, who, to whom and why each text of Scripture was written. Both are good, but problematic when approached from a stance of unbelief and treating the Bible as if it's like any other book.)

D.F. Strauss, Ernest Renan, and F.C. Baur – Biblical scholars who said that there was no need to believe the supernatural, "mythical" elements of the NT. Also, that Jesus and Paul's teaching were different, sometimes contradictory.

"Old" Princeton Theologian/Scholars who defended the faith against the higher critics:

Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) – founded Princeton Seminary; first Professor of Theology

Charles Hodge (1797-1878) – the "premier Reformed theologian of America's 19th century"

A.A. Hodge (1823-1886) – Charles' son, and theological giant in his own right

B.B. Warfield (1851-1921) – succeeded A.A. Hodge as Professor of Theology

Walter Rauschenbusch (1861 – 1918)

Born in Rochester, NY into a Christian family, he became the pastor of the Second German Baptist Church in NYC in 1885 (at age 24). He was very active in social causes and started working towards

social reform, seeing the calling of Christians to help people's lives; Jesus' death wasn't important so much for substitutionary atonement but because it was Jesus' war against sins like bigotry and social injustice. He wrote *Christianity and the Social Crisis* that was published in 1907 and became a bestseller. Also wrote *A Theology of the Social Gospel* and *Christianizing the Social Order*. Because his family was German, after the war his popularity went down greatly, but others like Fosdick carried on his ideas. Apparently greatly influenced Martin Luther King Jr.

The Fundamentals - Between the years 1910 and 1915, Lyman and Milton Stewart, two businessmen paid to have a series of booklets published that would lay out the fundamentals of the Christian faith, to be distributed for free to every "pastor, evangelist, missionary, theological student, Sunday School superintendent, and YMCA secretary" they could find. The booklets were written by conservative, orthodox Bible teachers aiming to counteract the rising liberalism and modernism that was seen as a threat to the traditional faith. Science was starting to make claims that Christianity and the Bible were false, and universities were siding with science.

Scopes Monkey Trial in 1925 - What turned the public's opinion against fundamentalists was the Scopes Monkey Trial in Dayton, Tennessee. John Scopes violated Tennessee's law against teaching evolution in class. Clarence Darrow, the lawyer for the evolutionist schoolteacher, lost, but made William Jennings Bryan and the fundamentalist side look really bad. Fundamentalist became synonymous with backwoods, ignorant, anti-scientific religion.

Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878 - 1969)

Fosdick said the central aim of liberal theology was to make it possible for a man "to be both an intelligent modern and a serious Christian." On May 22, 1922 in the pulpit of First Presbyterian Church in NYC (though he was a Baptist), he preached the sermon "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" Belief in the virgin birth, the inerrancy of Scripture and the Second Coming are untrue and unnecessary. "Our modern minds cannot use many of the Bible's teachings about Jesus. Christianity must be changed to fit into the modern, scientific age." John Rockefeller, the wealthiest man in the nation loved it and paid for 130,000 copies to be printed and distributed to every Protestant minister in the US. He departed from liberalism a bit in later years, but that's what he's remembered for.

The Auburn Affirmation (1924) - The high point of American Presbyterianism's rejection of the Scriptures. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1923 had upheld the 5 essential truths of the fundamentals of Christianity:

- 1) inerrancy of Scripture
- 2) virgin birth and deity of Christ
- 3) substitutionary atonement
- 4) physical resurrection of Christ
- 5) supernatural miracles

Within a year, over 150 Presbyterian elders issued an affirmation in Auburn, New York that essentially said that those 5 fundamentals were unnecessary, non-essential doctrines for the church. Eventually 10% of the Presbyterian clergy, almost 1,300 ministers would sign this. Not a single one of the signers of this document were ever brought up on charges in his Presbytery. And eventually those guys were placed in positions of leadership in the church hierarchy, poisoning the mainline Presbyterian church that continues to today.

J. Gresham Machen (1881 – 1937)

Machen fought the liberal slide of the Presbyterian Church. He wrote *Christianity and Liberalism* to show that liberalism is not a branch of Christianity, it is a completely different religion. Christianity is centered on Christ's work on the cross that paid the penalty for sin; when you deny that and don't care about sin, you've left historical Christianity.

Princeton Seminary and the Presbyterian Church went rapidly liberal and downhill quickly. Machen tried to hold the orthodox line and "rally the troops," but it didn't work and he was vilified for his efforts. In 1929, the General Assembly voted to reorganize Princeton Seminary to favor liberal theology; Machen spoke against it, but lost. So Machen resigned and organized Westminster Seminary with 3 other professors.

Missions became a huge issue with Machen. The Presbyterian church sent out missionaries who didn't see a need to preach Christ, just wanted to help people. When the denomination wouldn't listen to Machen, he started the Independent Board of Foreign Missions and served as president. In 1936, the denomination stripped him of his ministerial credentials for being part of that organization. So with a lot of other like-minded ministers and church members, he formed the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. A few months after it began, though, Machen was travelling in North Dakota in minus 20 degree weather and died of pneumonia at the age of 55.

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