

Modern Church History (Part 11: Roman Catholicism and the New Cults¹)

II. Theological Decline and Reconstruction.

C. Roman Catholicism.

1. “The small but influential Roman Catholic charismatic group and the relation of the Roman Catholic church to the state have already been considered. The 732 million Catholics throughout the world have been subjected to great changes since **Vatican II**. These changes are all the more remarkable because, from the French Revolution on, the papal leadership tried to maintain a closed society insulated from the liberal political, economic, social, and religious changes in Europe.”



2. “**Benedict XV** (1914-22) sought to develop more uniformity in the church with the completion of the codification of canon law by 1917. In 1943 Pius XII (1876-1958) in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* encouraged Roman Catholic scholars to make more use of the findings of archaeology and textual criticism. Bible reading on the part of the laity was encouraged by Vatican II decisions.”



3. “**Pius XII**, who became pope in 1939, reinforced the link with the past in 1950 by his proclamation of the bodily assumption of Mary into heaven by miraculous means after her death. There is also some tendency to associate Mary with Christ in His redemptive work.”



4. “Still greater change in the church was inaugurated in January 1959 when **John XXIII** (pope from 1958 to 1963) announced to his cardinals his plan to hold a new ecumenical council. The council, which met from 1962 to 1965 in four fall sessions, was, according to John, to advance *aggiornamento*, or ‘renewal.’ He said that he wanted Vatican II to be ‘pastoral’ rather than doctrinal or governmental. Rather than bringing any immediate major change in doctrine



or polity, it created new attitudes that have affected relations with Protestant and Orthodox denominations. Reflecting the new spirit, individual leaders, such as **Hans Kung**, even raised questions about papal infallibility. John's assertion that the content or substance of doctrine should not change but that forms are open to change may well open the way even to doctrinal change. Supporters of change and of

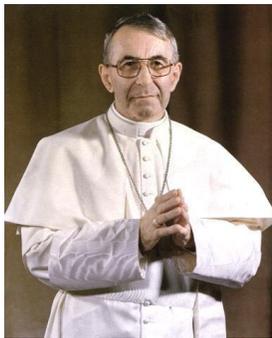


¹ Taken from Earle Carnes *Christianity through the Centuries*, pp. 459-463.

reaction clashed during the sessions at which about twenty-seven hundred Roman Catholics and some Protestant observers were present.”

5. “The importance of the laity was recognized by many references to them as the ‘people of God’ and assertions of their spiritual priesthood. They were encouraged to read the Bible and were even to be allowed to participate in the Mass, which was now permitted to be carried out in the vernacular of each country. The Bible and tradition were linked in a new way by considering them to be one expression of the Holy Spirit. Protestants were described as ‘separated brethren’ rather than as schismatics and heretics as in the past. Cooperation in the ecumenical movement, forbidden earlier, was encouraged. Liberty of worship for all was accepted. Collegiality of the bishops with the pope was proclaimed, and Pope Paul called a council of bishops. Its acts were not effective, however, without the proclamation of its decisions by the pope. The pope opposed both birth control and clerical marriage.”

6. “Pope **John Paul I** seemed to follow the more free, informal approach of John



XXIII. Pope **John Paul II** is a more colorful and popular pope, understands

communism better, and is more conservative than his predecessors. He faces many problems, such as falling attendance at mass, Latin American liberation theology, the demand for the ordination of women, and scholars who question certain doctrines of the church. He has reacted vigorously against the



more liberal tendencies of Hans Kung and Schillebeeckx with disciplinary measures.”

7. “Cooperation in ecumenical ventures, however, still continues. Pius XII in *Mortalium Animos* (1928) had forbidden ecumenical cooperation. If there was to be any reunion, he declared, it would come about by the return of the schismatic churches to the Roman Catholic church. In contrast, in 1960 Pope John [XXIII] created a Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity under the leadership of **Cardinal Bea**. Five Catholic observers were allowed to be present at the meeting of the World Council of Churches meeting in 1961 in New Delhi. A



Joint Working Group of Roman Catholics and representatives of the World Council have met several times since 1965 to chart paths of cooperation and possible eventual union. Protestant observers were cordially invited to be present at Vatican II. Pope Paul met with the Eastern patriarch **Athenagoras** in Constantinople in 1964. On December 7, 1965,

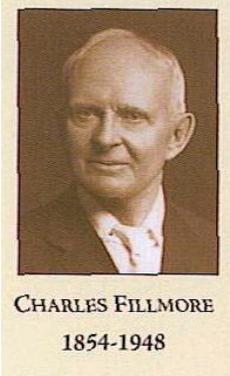


Paul in Rome and Athenagoras in Constantinople revoked the mutual excommunication of each church by the other in 1054. All of these openings to the world are in sharp contrast to the closed church of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.”

D. New Cults.

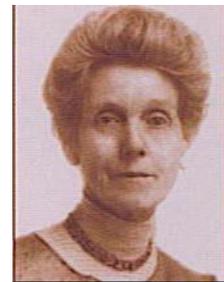
1. "Many unhappy souls, who were dissatisfied with the lack of authority in liberalism, turned to the message of theological or ethical absolutism proclaimed by various cults, many of which have arisen since World War I. The doctrines of cults are developed outside the pale of the church, and the leaders of cults seek to win converts from the church by proselyting and by meetings, home visitation, or correspondence courses. The cults not only *claim* to have final or absolute answers to the problems of health, sorrow, popularity, and success, but they also offer an authority that the hungry soul cannot find in liberal Protestant churches. They are often deceptive, exclusive, and negative toward culture."

2. "Cults such as Spiritualism, Theosophy, New Thought, Unity, and Christian Science oppose materialistic interpretations of the universe and assert its unity and spiritual nature. Spiritualism in particular grew fast after World War I because those who had lost loved fathers, husbands, or brothers in the war sought to communicate with them through mediums. Both Unity and New Thought were developments of the Quimby process of mental healing that Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy had used to good advantage in building up Christian Science. **Charles Fillmore**, who had been a cripple from infancy, and his wife, **Myrtle**, who had had tuberculosis, developed the idea of



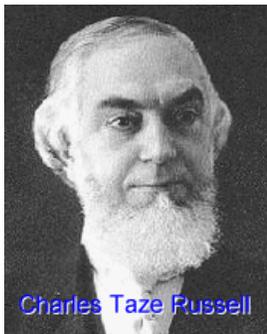
CHARLES FILLMORE
1854-1948

their unity with God so that illness and poverty could have no hold on them. Their group grew so much that the leaders of the movement have built Unity City near Kansas City, Missouri."



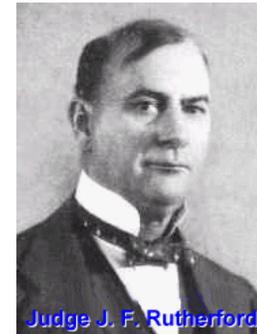
MYRTLE FILLMORE
1845-1931

3. "The Russelites – or, as they prefer to be known since 1931, Jehovah's Witnesses – were founded in 1872 by **Charles T. Russell** (1852-1916), whose avid study of the Bible led him to oppose the churches and ministers as tools of the devil and to preach the doctrine of Christ's return and the participation of the 'witnesses' in that event. Because they claim that their only allegiance is to God, members of Jehovah's Witnesses will not salute the flag nor serve in the armed forces. Their leaders were not recognized as ministers in World War II. **Judge Rutherford**



Charles Taze Russell

(1861-1942) a Missouri lawyer, became the leader upon Russell's death in 1916. The movement which was



Judge J. F. Rutherford

incorporated as the Zion Watch Tower Tract Society in New York in 1884, distributes millions of books and tracts. It is estimated that there are about 500,000 adherents in the United States and over 2 million in the world."

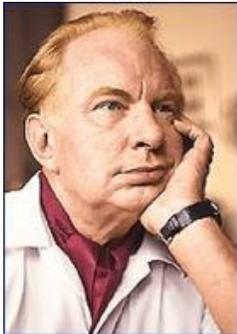


4. "The Oxford Group, or Buchmanites, do not constitute a particular organization but seek to work in the churches somewhat after the fashion of the Pietists who desired to rejuvenate Lutheranism in the seventeenth century. **Frank N. D. Buchman** (1876-1961), the leader, was a Lutheran minister in

Pennsylvania who was dissatisfied with his spiritual experience. He tried to reach the well-to-do and educated through his gospel of the changed life; 'sharing,' or confession to the group; guidance; and the four absolutes of honesty, purity, love, and unselfishness. House parties for personal witnessing and public confession have been the method of operation adopted by the group. It has won many notable converts and even sought in Moral Rearmament, its new name, to prevent the coming of World War II by winning the leaders of states to Christianity. It has helped the educated and rich, whom the church often fears to challenge with the claims of Christ lest it lose their support. Two weaknesses of the group are that the lack of a sound theology may lead to the substitution of the feeling of release, after one has 'shared' sins, for real regeneration, and confession may be directed only to man rather than to God."

5. "Occult and Eastern cults from Asia have won many Western young people who are seeking inner peace and security. Astrology has become a religion to some, as the magazines on astrology on newsstands indicate, Satan worship and witchcraft cults have their devotees in Europe and the United States. Buddhism, forms of Hinduism, Hare Krishna, Transcendental Meditation, and assorted gurus claim the allegiance of many, especially young people. These groups, however, seem to have peaked in membership."

6. "The Unification Church of **Sun Myung Moon** (1920-), founded in 1954 in Korea, now with about 200,000 followers; the Church of Scientology under the leadership of



L. Ron Hubbard, with headquarters in England; and The Way International led by **Paul V. Wierwelle** [sic], a Princeton Seminary alumnus, are reputed to practice something like mind control of their followers. The new convert is surrounded by loving concern; given much work, little sleep, and a low protein diet; and urged to listen to repetitious tapes and speeches by the leader. The PFAL course taken

by all members of The Way in twelve three-hour sessions over three weeks costs \$85.00. The denial of the essential deity of Christ and antinomian morals divide these cults from orthodox Christianity. Many young people seem to be attracted to them."

7. "Neoorthodoxy, evangelicalism, and the cults appear to have risen to meet the need for a religious message with authority. To some extent, such movements are attempts to fill the spiritual void created by the theological bankruptcy of liberalism with its shallow message of a vague fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man. Liberalism taught morality but neglected the religious dynamic of the Cross, which alone can energize a life so that it conforms to Christian ethics."

