

**CHURCH HISTORY**  
**Reactions to Historic Protestantism**  
**During the Modern Era in Europe, part 1 (1500-1700)**

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**The Modern Church, part 5**

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. For at least one thousand years (500-1500) the Roman Church had dominated everything in the west, and her authority practically went unchallenged. With the Protestant Reformation came the first real break with Rome and the lines of authority were broken down. Historic Protestantism tried to establish its authority, but this too was challenged. The Reformation had created a spirit of independence and the right to interpret the Bible according to the dictates of one's own conscience. In some cases, this led to anarchy in spiritual matters, denying any and all kinds of authority, even the authority of God.
- B. The sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries were reactions to historic Protestantism, which had become the established organization in Protestant countries. Some of these reactions were helpful, but most were detrimental to the true Christian Faith.

II. THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY (1500-1600)

- A. *Introduction:* The first reaction to historic Protestantism was that of the Roman Church. About 20 years after the beginning of the Reformation, the Roman Catholics began what is commonly called the Counter-reformation. Catholicism organized to crush Protestantism in Europe. The Counter-reformation was responsible for the recovery of most of Poland and Austria, and parts of Southern Germany for Catholicism, and for keeping Bavaria, Belgium and Ireland in the Catholic fold. The Counter-reformation was successful because: (1) Protestants lost their early evangelical enthusiasm; (2) a controversial spirit grew among Protestants; (3) the papacy had the advantage of a thoroughly organized system; and (4) the Roman Church profited by the Protestant Reformation in that it made them attempt reform.

- B. *Internal Reform*: The Reformation stirred the Catholics to do something about the corruptions in its own organization. There was a reform among the clergy, especially in Spain, but there was no real reform in Roman Catholic doctrine.
- C. *Index*: The Index was a list of books that a Roman Catholic was forbidden to read. Through this means the writings of Calvin and Luther were kept from the Roman Catholic people.
- D. *Inquisition*: The medieval concept of the Inquisition was revived in the sixteenth century. Heretics were cruelly tortured. The Inquisition was a complete success in Italy and Spain, but the Netherlands, after terrible persecutions, survived the Inquisition and Protestantism conquered there.
- E. Jesuits
1. The one group that probably made the Counter-reformation a success was the Jesuits. The Jesuits (Society of Jesus) were a Catholic order of monks founded in Paris in 1534 by Ignatius Loyola. The single purpose of the Jesuits was to win people back to the Roman Catholic Church.
  2. The Jesuits were absolutely unscrupulous in their methods, holding that it was permissible to do evil if good might come of it. They set up schools to convert the minds of the populace, sought to infiltrate governmental offices, and to use every means fair or foul to advance the cause of the Roman Church. Their schemes sometimes included plans for the assassination of their opponents, including the highest in the land. "The Jesuit is despotic in Spain, constitutional in England, republican in Paraguay, begot in Rome, and idolater in India."
  3. Francis Xavier (1506-1552) was a famous Jesuit missionary who spread the Roman Church to Asia. In India, Japan and other Asian countries, Xavier claimed to have baptized no less than 700,000 converts. This work, of course, was superficial and was greatly criticized by the Roman Church because it accustomed itself too much to heathen customs and practices. The Jesuits were also active in missionary work in North and South America.
  4. The power of the Jesuits became so great and their methods so immoral that in 1773 Pope Clement XIV abolished their order. For forty years the Jesuits lay low, and then in 1814 Pope Pius VII restored the Jesuits to their former position.

## F. Council of Trent

1. The Council of Trent, which met in a total of 25 sessions under three popes over the years 1545 to 1563, was the Catholic doctrinal answer to the Protestants. The Council issued a statement of faith by which a true Catholic could determine his orthodoxy.
2. While this Council helped the Roman Church make some moral reforms, it upheld the teaching of the Roman Church developed during the Middle Ages. The Council of Trent concluded: (1) the Latin Vulgate to be the authoritative Bible of all Catholics; (2) the apocryphal books to be inspired Scripture; (3) the concept of purgatory to be scriptural; (4) the placing of Church tradition in equal authority with Scripture; (5) the value of images, relics and indulgences; (6) that every Catholic must accept the interpretation of Scripture given by the Church; (7) the necessity of the sacraments for true salvation; and (8) the ultimate authority of the pope over the Church.

## III. THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY (1600-1700): The Age of Orthodoxy

### A. Protestant Scholasticism

1. The Protestant cause during the seventeenth century was primarily concerned with dogmatic formulation of their positions for the purpose of catechizing their adherents. Protestants were guilty of giving intellectual assent to creeds without stressing the importance of Christian living. An overemphasis upon justification by faith and the concept of the state-church system brought a spirit of antinomianism (against law) to many Protestants. The two basic results of Protestant Scholasticism were: (1) formalism and dead orthodoxy; and (2) theological controversy.
2. There are always three reactions to dead orthodoxy: (1) rationalism, which places emphasis upon reason; (2) mysticism, which places emphasis upon experience; and (3) biblical revivalism, which places emphasis upon biblical Christian experience, with a proper balance between doctrine and experience.

## B. Arminianism

1. The first major departure from historic Protestantism was the teaching of Jacobus Arminius in the Netherlands. It was an unhealthy reaction to the coldness of the Dutch Reformed Church and led to a serious doctrinal error.
2. Jacobus Arminius was born in Holland in 1560. He was an orphan and left destitute after the death of his father. A family in England heard of Arminius' problem, took him in, and raised him until he was fifteen. During this time in England, he was educated in Latin, Greek and the sciences. Feeling the call to the ministry, he entered the University of Leyton in Amsterdam, Holland. He prepared there until he was 22. He later went to Geneva and Basel, and was noted for his scholarship. The University of Basel wanted to confer a doctor's degree on him, but he refused it and decided to travel. When he was 28, he was ordained by the presbytery and called to pastor a Reformed church in Holland. He became an outstanding and well-liked preacher. He was asked to defend the doctrines of predestination, election and total depravity, but he found that he could not conscientiously do so, and he became a secret freewill theologian. However, his freewill doctrines began to show up in his preaching. Nevertheless, he was installed as professor of theology at the University of Leyden. To teach at this university, he had to give consent to the Reformed Faith. Somehow he convinced his colleagues that he was within the realm of the Reformed Orthodox Faith, and intellectually Arminius probably felt he was. Finally, Arminius was forced to show his hand and came out loud and clear against the orthodox Reformed position of salvation. Arminius died before he could clearly define his system of theology.
3. Arminius taught: (1) that man was sinful but not totally depraved; (2) that God elected to salvation those whom he had foreseen would believe; (3) that God is sovereign, but limited his plan so as to give man a free will to choose for or against Christ; (4) that God's grace works in co-operation with man's will in salvation; (5) that Christ died a substitutionary death for all men; and (6) that it was possible for a person to lose his salvation. Arminius, while seeming to hold to election, actually destroyed it. He made God's election dependent upon the action of man.

4. Arminius had trained many young men in his theology, and before long the whole country was in theological controversy. After the death of Arminius, Simon Episcopus developed the Arminian system of theology. The followers of Arminius distorted his system with views he did not hold. However, it must be said that the followers of Arminius simply carried the viewpoint of the limited sovereignty of God to its logical conclusion.
5. The Arminian theologians set forth their protests to the Calvinistic system of theology in the Remonstrance, setting forth the five points of Arminianism which are:
  - a. *Partial Depravity*: Man is never so completely corrupted by sin that he cannot savingly believe the gospel when it is put before him.
  - b. *Resistible Grace*: Man is never so completely controlled by God that he cannot resist the sovereign wooing of the Spirit.
  - c. *Limited Sovereignty*: God limited His sovereignty so as to give man a free will in salvation.
  - d. *Unlimited Atonement*: Christ atoned for the sins of the whole world.
  - e. *Conditional Election*: God elected those whom he foresaw would believe, making faith the first cause in salvation. It rests with believers to keep themselves saved by keeping up their own faith.
6. To settle this controversy, the Synod of Dort (1618) was called. This was the greatest synod ever held by the Reformed churches, for there were representatives from the Netherlands, England, Germany and Switzerland. The Synod unanimously rejected and very positively condemned the teachings of the Arminians, and stated the true Reformed doctrine in the Cannons of Dort. The Counter-remonstrance was set forth which states the five points of Calvinism. These points are:
  - a. *Total Depravity*: man, in his fallen state, is so sinful he cannot respond to God without supernatural enablement.

- b. *Unconditional Election*: God elects men to salvation according to his own sovereign will.
  - c. *Limited Atonement*: Christ's death secures and guarantees the salvation of only those who believe (the elect).
  - d. *Irresistible Grace*: When the Holy Spirit sovereignly calls a person to salvation, this call will not be resisted.
  - e. *Perseverance of the Saints*: Once saved, a true believer cannot be lost, but will persevere in the faith until death.
7. Arminians were put out of the presbytery and were persecuted socially somewhat for five years, and then given freedom by the government to establish their own churches and schools. Arminianism had a great influence in England. It invaded the Anglican Church and nearly all the dissenting denominations.

### C. Pietism

1. *Introduction*: Pietism originally was a healthy reaction to the Protestant scholasticism of German Lutheranism. Pietism stressed charitable work, Christian living, personal Bible study, wholesome Christian fellowship, simple practical preaching, and the avoiding of theological controversy. There was never any thought of breaking from the Lutheran Church.
2. *Philipp Spener (1635-1705)*: He was born in western Germany. He became alarmed that there was no appeal to the "motions, no call to conversion, and no exhortation to Christian living and full-time service. Spener was tremendously influenced by Richard Baxter and John Bunyan, both Puritan Calvinists, and he began to preach on sin, new birth, and holy living. He opposed the external sins of his day (dancing, theatergoing, card playing), and favored moderation in eating, drinking, and dress. He met with bitter opposition from those within the established organization of the Lutheran Church.
3. *August Francke (1663—1727)*: When he was a 24-year-old instructor at the University of Leipzig, he experienced the new birth and then joined the Pietist movement. He began to lecture and preach on various

university campuses, and received much opposition. Spener, secured for him an appointment to the newly founded university at Halle. Francke now made the University of Halle a center of Pietism. Here he stressed the evil of sin and the need for atonement in much the same way as did the English Puritans. Francke's influence on missions was tremendous. During the first part of the eighteenth century, sixty missionaries went to the foreign field. This was the first real foreign missionary effort by Protestants.

4. *Moravian Brethren*: The influence of the Pietists continued, and among those affected was Count Zinzendorf who allowed a group of Moravian Brethren (a branch of the Church of John Hus) to settle on his estate at Herrnhut in Saxony in 1722. This small group organized themselves as a separate church with bishops, elders, and deacons, with a definite presbyterian emphasis. To the Moravians belongs everlastingly the honor of being the first Protestant body to take seriously the Great Commission. Eventually, they established missions in Africa, Asia, Greenland, Lapland, and among the American Indians. Unfortunately, the spread of the warmhearted faith of the Pietists was somewhat arrested by the rise of Rationalism, and the development of Deism.
5. *Shortcomings*: Pietism had its drawbacks, as well as its blessings, which are: (1) it was ascetic and emphasized severe self-denial; (2) it was critical and uncharitable, condemning as irreligious everyone who was not a Pietist; (3) it denied the name of Christian to all those who could not tell a story of conscious conversion through an intense struggle; (4) it played down doctrine and emphasized experience, thus setting the stage for liberalism and modernism in Germany.

#### D. Quakerism:

1. The founder of the Quaker movement was George Fox. He was the son of a shoemaker, and practically the only book he knew anything about was the Bible. In England during his day, there was much religious insincerity and unreality among the church people. Quakerism reacted to the deadness of the Church of England. The soul of Fox thirsted for truth and sincerity in religion.
2. Fox believed in the Bible, but he believed that it remained a closed book unless the mind of man was illuminated by the Holy Spirit. Fox called this illumination by the Spirit the "inner light." His followers

believed that this inner light told them what was right and wrong; thus this ultimately led to an experience-centered Christianity. Fox had no use for any of the existing churches, nor for their creeds or their theology. He did not believe in theological schools, in formal training or the ministry, or in engaging professional ministers. His followers are called Quakers because they are said to have trembled when they prayed, or at the thought of committing a sin. They are better known today as the Society of Friends.

3. In their services, Quakers have no pulpit, they do not sing, they have no musical instruments. They sit and wait for the moving of the Spirit before one speaks. They do not take oaths and they are pacifists.
4. In 1654 there were sixty Quakers. By 1660 there were around 30,000. This was a reaction to the dead scholasticism in the Anglican Church. These folks had a missionary zeal for their cause and went to Africa, Europe and America. When the persecutions ceased, zeal waned, and very strict discipline on their membership caused few converts and lost many former members.

#### E. Socinianism

1. The rationalistic movement to Protestant scholasticism in the seventeenth century was Socinianism, so named for its founder Faustus Socinus (1539-1604). Coming originally from Italy, Socinus spent most of his years of teaching and preaching in Poland.
2. Socinus was a heretic. He was anti-Trinitarian and taught that Christ was a man who lived a life of exemplary obedience and was ultimately deified. One becomes a Christian by following Christ's example of devotion to God, renunciation of the world and humility. Christ's death was not substitutionary, but merely an example of ultimate devotion.
3. After many years of success in Poland, the Socinian movement was broken up by the Jesuits and its followers banished. Many of them found their way to Holland where they were welcomed by Arminians and others, and where they injected a considerable liberal influence into the theology of the country. From there Socinian influence also spread into the Church of England.