

CHURCH HISTORY SESSION 5
The Age of Reason and Revival
1648-1789

INTRO: At the same time the church was struggling to address its failures and abuses, the world in general was making a radical shift from faith to reason. This movement toward reason as the guiding principle of humanity shaped our nation and continues to influence us today.

The Age of Reason was an intellectual revolution, which changed the way people looked at God, at the world, and at themselves. It was the birth of secularism.

During the Middle Ages and the Reformation, faith took the lead. Reason served faith and bowed to authority. The Age of Reason rejected this. Instead reason became the master of faith. The primary focus was no longer on the next life but on how to obtain happiness and fulfillment in this life. This shift in thinking had major consequences for the Church.

I. The Rise of Denominations

A. Denominations are a present reality for the church.

1. They seem to run counter to the New Testament call for unity in the church.
2. In one way the growth of denominations is a positive response to the oppressive nature of the State Church.
3. Denominations exist today because we now have the freedom to disagree, something often denied people up through the time of the Reformation.

B. Non-conformists were to be suppressed.

1. Both Catholics and Protestants rejected the idea of personal religious freedom.
 - a. Christian truth was the glue that held societies together.
 - b. There could not possibly be truth on both sides of a conflict.
2. The Peace of Augsburg struck a compromise between Lutherans and Catholics.
 - a. The territorial principle: The ruler of each region could determine the faith of his subjects.
 - b. The only two choices were Lutheran or Catholic.
 - c. This gave some people a limited freedom of religion.
 - d. It also took away the freedom of religion for many.

3. Territorialism was the beginning of the death of Christendom.

C. The Thirty Years War

1. The 30 Years War began as a primarily religious struggle and ended as a primarily political one.
2. The Peace of Augsburg ignored the Calvinists, which set the stage for conflict.
3. Protestants formed a league of German Princes and the Catholics did the same.

4. The first conflict came when Ferdinand II was named king of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor.
 - a. Being devoutly Catholic, Ferdinand tried to impose Catholicism on Bohemia.
 - b. The majority of princes were Protestants so they rebelled.
 - c. The princes gave their allegiance to Frederick V, a Calvinist, which ignited the war in 1618.
 - d. The Catholic forces crushed the Bohemian princes.

5. In response to the Catholic victory King Christian IV of Denmark, a Lutheran, entered the war against Ferdinand and the Catholics. He was defeated.

6. King Gustavus Adolphus mustered his Swedish troops to turn the tide in favor of the Protestants. He was successful.

7. In the end the war came to a stalemate.

8. The Peace of Westphalia changed the religious and political face of Europe.
 - a. Calvinists were recognized along side of Lutherans and Catholics.
 - b. A prince was given the authority to allow Protestants and Catholics to coexist within his realm.
 - c. The Pope strongly opposed this treaty but the princes ignored him.
 - d. For the first time since Constantine politics and faith were functionally separated. The Pope no longer had control of the state or the state of the church.

D. The American Way

1. America was colonized primarily for economic reasons.

2. As an incentive for people to form new colonies in America religious freedom was granted.

3. The primary exception to this was the Congregational Puritans of Massachusetts Bay.
 - a. They used a loophole in their charter to establish Puritanism as the only faith.
 - b. For two generations religious conformity held sway in New England.
 - c. The demise of this system came from two sources.
 - d. They encouraged the active reading of Scripture, which produced dissenters.
 - These dissenters found ready sanctuary from the powers that be in the expansive wilderness of the New World.
 - One of these dissenters was Roger Williams who founded the first Baptist Church in America in 1639.
 - Roger Williams was a Puritan minister, theologian, and author who founded Providence Plantations, which became the Colony of Rhode Island. He was a staunch advocate for religious freedom, separation of church and state, and fair dealings with American Indians, and he was one of the first abolitionists.
 - Williams was expelled by the Puritan leaders from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for spreading "new and dangerous ideas", and he established the Providence Plantations in 1636 as a refuge offering what he called "liberty of conscience". In 1638, he founded the First Baptist Church in America, also known as the First Baptist Church of Providence. He studied the Indian

languages and wrote the first book on the Narragansett language, and he organized the first attempt to prohibit slavery in any of the American colonies.

e. In 1684 the Massachusetts Bay Company lost their charter and fell under the control of the English crown.

E. The Idea of Denominations

1. The religious diversity of the American colonies sparked the birth of denominations.
2. The term denomination was first used in the early days of the Evangelical Revival led by John Wesley and George Whitefield. (around 1740)
3. Denominationalism was a response to sectarianism.
 - a. A sect claims exclusive control of truth and biblical authority.
 - b. A denomination recognizes itself as a piece of a larger whole.
 - The true church cannot be identified with one single ecclesiastical structure.
 - Each denomination represents a different form of the larger life of the church.
4. The seeds of denominations were sown by the Reformers but not allowed to germinate.
5. True denominationalism came from the 17th century Independents (Congregationalists) who represented the minority voice at the Westminster Assembly in England in 1642-1649.
6. They were motivated by a desire to preserve church unity while allowing a certain amount of diversity.
7. These Dissenting Brethren offered several reasons for denominations.
 - a. Differences in opinion about the outward form of the church are inevitable.
 - b. These differences are important although not fundamental. Every Christian has an obligation to practice what he believes the Bible teaches.
 - c. The true Church cannot be fully represented by a single ecclesiastical structure. No church has the final and full grasp of biblical truth.
 - d. It is possible to be divided on many points but still be united in Christ.
8. Denominational theory seeks unity in the church while allowing for diversity in the outward expressions of personal faith.
9. Denominational theory was slow to be accepted in England but found fertile ground in the American colonies.

II. The Cult of Reason

A. The Spirit of the Age of Reason

1. The Age of Reason was an intellectual revolution against the influence of the Church.
2. This period is called the Enlightenment and was the birth of secularism.

3. Up to this time reason was the servant of faith, guided by the authority of the Church or Scripture.

4. Reason took the place of faith during the Enlightenment.

B. The Renaissance

1. The Renaissance was the rebirth of classical Greek & Roman literature, politics and art.

2. A chief spokesman for the Renaissance was Erasmus.

a. He was not afraid to challenge the status quo such as monasticism & scholasticism in the church.

b. At first it seemed that he was another voice for the Reformation.

c. Erasmus parted company with Luther and other Reformers over a basic view of humanity.

- Luther viewed man as enslaved to sin and unable, without the grace of God, to love or serve God.

- Erasmus rejected this idea. He believed that humanity was basically good.

3. The Reformers preached original sin and a fallen corrupt world.

4. The Renaissance preached a noble humanity and a positive world.

5. Another catalyst for the Renaissance was a century of religious wars. A desire for tolerance and acceptance took the place of a desire for doctrinal purity.

6. Another factor in the birth of the Renaissance was the rise of science and with it the concept of natural laws and inherent order in the universe.

a. Copernicus introduced the idea that earth revolved around the sun.

b. Kepler discovered the magnetic pull of the sun, which keeps the planets in place.

c. Galileo developed the telescope, which allowed people to look deep into space and study the heavens.

d. Newton introduced the concept of gravity and natural laws, which govern our world.

C. The World-Machine

1. The rise of science called into question the spiritual and supernatural world.

2. The universe could now be explained by physical laws and mathematics.

3. The core belief became man's ability to discover truth for himself using his senses and reason.

4. Reason and common sense replaced God's grace.

5. Some Christians in England worked hard to harmonize reason and faith.

6. The intellectuals in France rejected the scriptures and embraced human reason.

7. John Locke synthesized the two concepts and came up with a whole different understanding.
 - a. Man can discover that God exists through reason.
 - b. The God that Locke discovered is not the God in the Bible.
 - c. He reduced revelation to the one essential doctrine that Jesus is the Messiah.
 - d. Everything else is irrelevant to life.
 - e. Locke put his emphasis on moral conduct. Faith became simply a faith in Jesus and ethical behavior.

D. The Rise of the Radicals

1. At the beginning of the 18th century many intellectuals just set aside revelation.
2. Paris became the capital of this new culture of reason.
3. A group called the philosophes took it upon themselves to spread this new gospel.
4. Most of this group believed in a Supreme Being but not the God of the Bible.
 - a. This Supreme Being did not interfere with the world.
 - b. This belief is called Deism.
 - c. Some call this idea the “watch-maker” God. He created the world, set it in motion and now has no interaction with it.
5. Deists believed that their religion was the original religion of humanity.
6. Their chief spokesman was Voltaire (1694-1778). He embodied the skepticism of French Enlightenment.
7. Voltaire did not want to destroy religion. He is quoted as having said, “If a God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent one.”

E. Christianity on Trial

1. Christianity was seen as a scheme to subdue the world to the priestly caste.
2. The intellectuals judged Christianity on the basis of good and evil.
3. Their primary weapon against the church was truth, as they defined truth.
4. They rejected all revelation and reduced truth only to those things that can be proved and verified through reason.

F. The Church’s Response

1. The Catholic Church in Europe gave a totally inadequate response to this new threat. They tried to use their old methods and demanded the secular authorities subdue this new thinking.
2. In England the Church took a different approach.
 - a. Bishop Joseph Butler wrote “The Analogy of Religion”
 - b. Butler was able to show clearly and convincingly the flaws in the Deists’ position.
 - c. He undermined the Deists’ confidence in reason as the final word.

3. Deism also collapsed because it was based on a false optimism. They could not explain the evils and disasters of life.

4. The collapse of Deism did not restore Christianity; it left the world in a neutral position.

III. The Pietists

A. The Age of Reason could not quench the thirst of the soul.

1. The Catholic Church in France tried to guard its position of power and influence.

a. The main teachers and confessors for the wealthy & powerful were the Jesuits.

b. The Jesuits were masters of psychology.

c. They developed the skill of casuistry, the science of right and wrong for the Christian conscience.

d. The Jesuits tended to be very lenient and offered cheap grace to their people.

2. The strongest opposition to the Jesuits was Cornelius Jansen.

a. Jansen was a follower of the writings of St. Augustine.

b. Jansen felt that the best way to handle the challenges against the Catholic church was to return to a strict moral code.

c. This became known as Jansenism.

d. Jansen argued that God had chosen those who would be saved before the foundations of the earth.

e. Good works could not earn a person's salvation outside of the grace of God.

f. Man's will is not free and his nature is corrupt.

g. Jansen challenged the teachings of the Jesuits about free will.

h. He felt they made far too much of human reason and not enough of unquestioning faith in God.

B. Port-Royal

1. Jansenism was carried to France and planted at a Cistercian convent called Port-Royal.

2. The reputation for devotion at Port-Royal grew and attracted women and a group of devoted laymen called Solitaires.

3. Among these men was Antoine Arnauld, a member of the Sorbonne, the theological faculty of the University of Paris.

4. After Jansen's death Arnauld took the leadership of the Jansenist cause.

5. He attacked the Jesuits for their cheap grace.

6. The Jesuits shot back that Jansenism was just Calvinism in Catholic garb.

7. When the Sorbonne tried to expel Arnauld he turned to his friend Blaise Pascal for help.

8. Pascal was a young scientist and writer.

9. He had been greatly influenced in a positive way by the Jansenists.

C. Pascal's conversion

1. Pascal struggled with his faith.

2. At first Pascal avidly studied Scripture but after some personal tragedy he turned to the pleasures of the world.

3. Pascal felt abandoned by God.

4. In his despair he returned to the Bible and encountered Jesus in John 17.

5. His new faith drew him to Port-Royal.

6. Pascal penned 18 Provincial Letters that exposed Jesuit theology and practices. All of educated France was reading these letters.

7. Pascal led an effective attack against the Jesuits and Reason. He argued that reason alone is no sure guide for life. Reason alone will lead us to doubt everything. God and the meaning of life must be experienced through the heart.

8. "The heart has its reasons which reason does not know."

9. After Pascal's death Jansenism was forced out of France.

Pascal's Wager

(1) It is possible that the Christian God exists and it is possible that the Christian God does not exist.

(2) If one believes in the Christian God then if he exists then one receives an infinitely great reward and if he does not exist then one loses little or nothing.

(3) If one does not believe in the Christian God then if he exists then one receives an infinitely great punishment and if he does not exist then one gains little or nothing.

(4) It is better to either receive an infinitely great reward or lose little or nothing than it is to either receive an infinitely great punishment or gain little or nothing.

Therefore:

(5) It is better to believe in the Christian God than it is not to believe in the Christian God.

(6) If one course of action is better than another then it is rational to follow that course of action and irrational to follow the other.

Therefore:

(7) It is rational to believe in the Christian God and irrational not to believe in the Christian God.

Three common objections to this argument will be considered here.

10. Protestantism was also falling prey to a heartless religion.

a. The powerful reformation was giving way to Protestant scholasticism and confessionism.

b. The Christian life was no longer defined as a personal relationship with Christ, but as a matter of membership in the state church.

- c. Pietism arose as a reaction to this.
- d. They stressed the importance of a personal faith.
- e. They wanted to shift the emphasis in the church away from the state church and toward intimate fellowships of genuine believers.

D. Three sparkplugs for Pietism

1. Philip Spencer (1635-1705)
 - a. While at the University of Strassburg Spencer was introduced to Luther's concept of justification by faith. He experienced a rebirth.
 - b. He accepted a call to pastor a church in the important Lutheran city of Frankfurt.
 - c. He was appalled by the spiritual condition he found there.
 - d. He abandoned the prescribed texts and began preaching from the whole Bible, stressing repentance and discipleship. In 1669 he preached from the Sermon on the Mount and a revival took place. Many people were converted and lives were changed.
 - e. Spencer started a small group in his home for the purpose of Scripture reading and religious conversation. Others called these meetings "gatherings of the pious". Pietism was born.
 - f. Spencer called for the development of Bible study groups for spiritual development.
 - g. He also called for a strenuous Christian life, greater emphasis on Christian character among theological students, and simpler, more spiritual preaching.
 - h. Spencer wanted to see small groups of experiential Christians in every church to bring a stricter and warmer Christian life.
 - i. Only those who had experienced a conversion experience would qualify for these groups.

2. August Hermann Francke (1663-1727)
 - a. Through the influence of Spencer, he became a professor at the University of Halle.
 - b. Francke had experienced a conversion while preparing a sermon on John 20:31
 - c. Francke pioneered several spiritual and social ministries.
 - He began a school for the poor at Halle.
 - He established an orphanage, a house for widows, and a house for unwed mothers.
 - He built a hospital and a medical dispensary.
 - He also established a book depot, a printing establishment and a Bible house.

3. Count von Zinzendorf (1700-1760)
 - a. The grandson of a nobleman who left Austria because of his religious convictions.
 - b. Zinzendorf studied law for three years at the University of Wittenberg.
 - c. When the remnants of the Moravians in Bohemia were looking for a safe place in Protestant lands, they found a home on Zinzendorf's estate.
 - d. In 1722 Christian David established Herrnhut (The Lord's Watch) on the estate.
 - e. They wanted to establish a completely Christian community along the monastic model except without celibacy.
 - f. They called themselves the United Brethren.
 - g. In 1727 Zinzendorf became the spiritual leader of the community.
 - h. The Moravians (United Brethren) were the first large-scale Protestant missionary movement.
 - i. Zinzendorf's major flaw was that he focused on an emotional, sentimental faith.

E. The influence of Pietism

1. Pietism made an enormous contribution to Christianity worldwide.
 - a. It shifted the emphasis of the church to the care of souls.
 - b. It made preaching and pastoral visitation central in Protestant ministry.
 - c. It enriched Christian music.
 - d. It emphasized the importance of a spiritual laity.
2. The dominant theme of Pietism is regeneration.
3. Pietism is the foundation for all modern revivals.
4. Pietism left behind two pieces of baggage for Evangelicalism.
 - a. Emotion was so important that it endangered the role of reason in faith. Pietists had little to say about God's place in nature and human history.
 - b. Pietists accepted the existence of the institutional church. It shifted the new birth and spiritual life from the traditional state church to small groups of committed believers.

IV. Wesley

A. John Wesley was the 15th child of Rev. Samuel and Samantha Wesley. Samuel was an Anglican pastor.

B. John's early journey.

1. He was well grounded in the faith by his mother, who was the daughter of a Nonconformist pastor.
2. John studied at Oxford and was exposed to the early church fathers.
3. In 1726 he became a fellow of Lincoln College in Oxford and two years later was ordained as an Anglican minister.
4. His brother Charles was concerned about the rise of Deism at the University and so gathered a small group of students who were determined to take their faith seriously.
5. John became the leader of this small band of believers. The other students nicknamed them Methodists because of their strict adherence to a prescribed rule of life, which stressed prayer, Bible reading, and attendance at Holy Communion.
6. John accepted an invitation to sail to America and be the chaplain for a new colony there. It was a total disaster and John returned to England a defeated man.
7. On his trip to America he encountered some Moravian missionaries who seemed to have the assurance of their salvation that John lacked.
8. Upon returning to London, John contacted Peter Bohler, a Moravian pastor, who explained the gospel of salvation by faith not works to John. At a Moravian meeting in Aldersgate street, on May 24, 1738 John's eyes were opened and he stepped across the line of faith. In his own words, "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."
9. John moved from a faith based on works to a faith based on faith.
10. John became the spark for the Wesleyan revival in England, which was spurred on by the Great Awakening in America.

11. John Wesley was the catalyst for the Methodist movement within the Anglican church. He encouraged his followers to remain faithful to their parish even as they met in their small groups for personal Bible study and prayer.

12. It wasn't until near the end of his life that the Methodist movement separated from the Church of England and became an entity in its own right.

13. Wesley sent Francis Asbury to America to establish Methodism there. In 1784 at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, the Methodist Church in America was officially born.

14. When John Wesley dies he had 79,000 followers in England and 40,000 in North America.