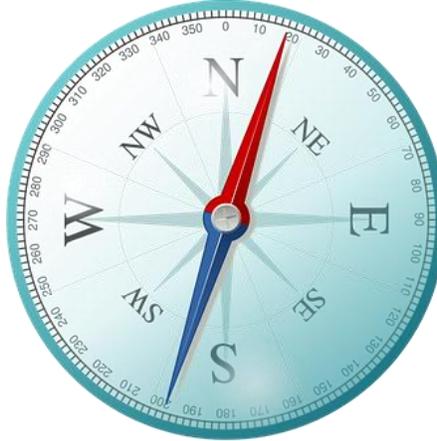


# HERESIES IN CHURCH HISTORY

*Guard what was committed to your trust,  
avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions  
of what is falsely called knowledge. (1Tim 6:20)*



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## INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ warned, “Take heed that no one deceives you. For many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (**Mat 24:4–5**). He continued, “For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mat 24.24).

The apostle Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to watch out for anyone who came preaching “another Jesus whom we have not preached...or a different gospel which you have not accepted” (**2Cor 11:4**). Paul explained to the Galatians that the perversion of the true gospel amounts to nothing less than “a different gospel,” and that anyone who preaches or practices such a “gospel” is to “be accursed” (**Gal 1:6–9**).

Such falsehoods are called HERESIES. The dictionary definition says it’s “an opinion or doctrine at variance with *established religious beliefs*.” APOSTASY, on the other hand is “an *abandonment of one’s religious faith*...” It describes someone who has lost his salvation, and not just the fellowship of other believers.

We must determine, in the examination of various theological beliefs, whether they merely describe a break in the uniform interpretation of Scripture, or whether the avowed interpretation is so far from Truth, that it constitutes a disavowal of Christian teaching altogether. Disagreement between two believers, or between two schools of thought, doesn’t necessarily mean *apostasy* on the part of one or the other, nor the rejection of mainline teaching. And *heretical* doesn’t necessarily mean apostasy either.

Apostasy is the point at which our belief departs from saving knowledge, from the gospel truth. Heresy, on the other hand, is the point at which our knowledge departs from church orthodoxy. It may or may not depart from saving knowledge. For example, rejecting infant baptism might be heresy under the Westminster Confession, but it would not impact a Calvinist’s saving knowledge. In their fine book, *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, Robert Peterson and Michael Williams make a curious observation:

The Synod of Dort was right to condemn the Arminian representation of the saving ways of God. Yet we do not think of Arminianism as a heresy or Arminian Christians as unregenerate. You see, calling someone a heretic is serious business. Heresy is not merely doctrinal error; it is damnable error. The heretic so mangles the gospel of Jesus Christ that it no longer communicates the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Heresy is such a corruption of the grace of God in Christ that it invalidates either Jesus as the Savior, or grace as the way of salvation. The Arminian tradition does neither.<sup>1</sup>

A couple of theology professors at a leading conservative seminary should be able to distinguish between heresy and apostasy, but apparently not. By defining heresy as damnable error, anything less than that — any departure from reformed orthodoxy — is then permissible. Arminianism is definitely heresy. It departs from church orthodoxy, as they readily concede. The issue the church has wrestled with for hundreds of years is whether it is also *apostasy*; and apostasy is what Peterson and Williams have defined here. They believe that Arminianism is not apostasy, and that the content of saving knowledge is restricted to two points: Jesus is the Savior, and grace is the way of salvation. It is tempting to say that even demons believe these things and tremble...

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<sup>1</sup> Peterson, Robert A. and Williams, Michael D. *Why I am not an Arminian* (IVP Downers Grove IL, 2004), p. 13.

Orthodoxy or dogma, which is the church's declaration of truth, should be distinguished from *Scriptural Truth*, which is the bible's declaration of truth. Obviously Church councils have always tried to ensure that the declared dogma of the Church conforms to Scriptural truth. But sometimes the church goes awry and needs to be corrected, and its teachings need to be realigned with Scripture. That's what Martin Luther was doing when he nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Chapel in 1517. Church dogma had strayed from Scriptural Truth.

Some of what we'll examine in this course is *subtle* – some heresies may be hard to distinguish from biblical truth, because they're so close. That's where the teachers of the church come to our aid, to help us make those vital distinctions.

As a general rule, every major heresy will attack either who Jesus Christ is, or what He accomplished on the cross. Therefore, the more we understand those two things, the more protected we will be from heresies – no matter how subtle they are.

The five battle-cries of the Reformation – the Five Solas – were a summons to sound doctrine and practice. We should be able to recall them at will:

***We're saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, standing on the authority of Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.***

That's a STANDARD by which to test the gospel truth of God. For example,

- If **grace** is minimized by basing our *justification* on anything other than a sovereign act of God (e.g., requiring human will or approval), that's a heresy.
- If anything is added to individual **faith** for *justification* (baptism, communion, works, church membership, etc.) that's a heresy.
- If anything is added to **Christ's perfect life and atoning sacrifice**, as the sole *cause of our justification*, that's a heresy.
- If anyone claims to have spiritual authority, or proclaims a doctrine, that is not grounded in or reasonably derived *only* from **God's written word**, that's a heresy.
- If **glory** is diverted from God, so as to draw glory to the things of men – even to the church and its practices, or to the offices or people of the church – that's heresy.

As you examine each heresy listed in this course, try applying the Five Solas as a test. See if you can figure out which of the five is contradicted by that heresy, and why.

## HERESIES DESCRIBED IN SCRIPTURE

**IDOLATERS** – Christians continued to worship or create idols in violation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment (2Cor 6.16). There were two sins here. The first was the practical use of the idols in worship; and the second was their continued presence, merely adding Christianity to their pagan beliefs (this is called **SYNCRETISM**).

**Response:** *abstain from the pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from what is strangled, and from blood.* Acts 15:20; 1Jn. 5:21

**NICOLAITANS** – Rev. 2:6,14-15 a sect holding to the “teaching of Balaam” which upheld the freedom to eat food offered to idols. The fear was that if Christians unwittingly ate such food, purchased from the marketplace and offered to an idol by its seller, that they had desecrated the temple of their body, losing their holiness and their salvation.

**Response** – Paul rejected that idea, saying “is that anything?” He provided a weaker-stronger brother standard in 1Cor. 8-10. This ruling upheld the freedom we have in Christ concerning food sacrificed to idols, but weighed that freedom against the temptation to new believers; its bottom line was to avoid it where possible, but not to fret if it happened. As far as the use or presence of idols, or committing fornication, Acts 15:20 is an absolute prohibition. Rev. 2:20 outright condemns intentionally eating food sacrificed to idols (i.e., *participating* in idolatry).

**No Resurrection of the Dead** – 1Cor. 15:12

**Response:** *if Christ is not raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. If we have existence in Christ only in this life, we are the most miserable of all men.* (v. 17,19)

**The resurrection already took place** – *spiritually* – 2Tim 2:16-18

**Response:** *Hymenaeus and Philetus... have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. We expect a physical resurrection of the bodies of all men at Christ’s return, some to eternal glory, the rest to eternal damnation.* (Dan. 12:2; 1Cor 15:23,42,52; 2Cor 5:10)

**ANTINOMIANISM** – this is a belief that because we are under grace, obedience is optional. Our freedom in Christ, our forgiven state, then becomes a license to sin.

**Response:** *What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, who are dead to sin, live in it any longer?* Rom. 6:1,2.

*Don’t you know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be misled: neither the immoral, idolaters, adulterers, the corrupt, the effeminate [man-boy sex], homosexuals, extortionists, thieves, drunkards, the pugnacious, nor defrauders will inherit the kingdom of God.* 1Cor. 6:9,10.

**JUDAISM** - The issue confronted is whether Christianity should remain within Judaism, or become an independent and distinct religion. If it remains within Judaism then,

1. Circumcision is a prerequisite to salvation for men.
2. Obedience to Jewish Law is necessary, including Sabbath and Kosher requirements.

**Response:**

1. It denies salvation by faith through Christ’s atoning sacrifice.
2. It undermines obedience inspired by love and thankfulness, and seeks a reward.

Two groups emerged among the Judaizers of the early church:

**A. Nazarenes** – They taught that Jesus was Messiah whose teachings supersede Moses and the Prophets, but those of Jewish descent must still obey the law.

**B. Ebionites** – They taught that Jesus was only a man, even if a prophet and spokesman of God. Some accepted Jesus' virgin birth. Others said he was born of the union of Joseph and Mary, but then Christ descended on that offspring at his baptism in the form of a dove. Christ departed the man prior to his crucifixion and resurrection.

**HELLENISM** – Greek philosophy found its way into Christian theology, especially the distinction between spirit and matter, often referred to as DUALISM.<sup>2</sup> It had two major streams, one from the Greek philosopher Plato, the other from middle eastern sects.

**A. Platonism** (following the teachings of Plato) and **Neo-Platonism**. The philosophy of Plato was used to analyze and restate Christian Truth. The result: flesh and matter are seen as evil, while pure spirit is good. The impetus for its development is that Platonism affords an explanation for sin continuing in the lives of Christian converts.

*Aberrations of Platonism-*

1. Christ was spirit, not flesh, and therefore didn't suffer on the cross.
2. The resurrection is spiritual, not physical and therefore it takes place daily.
3. Sex is evil, food is evil, drink is evil, etc.
4. Asceticism and mysticism are paths to true righteousness.

**Response:** "These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh." (Col 2:23 NKJ)

**B. Gnosticism** - Prominent founders within the Christian community included Simon Magus (the Samaritan magician found in the Book of Acts), Basilides of Alexandria, and Valentinus of Alexandria. It has its source in "gnosis" or *special knowledge* (sole truth) that has been revealed and transmitted secretly to the initiates of the sect.

1. Salvation is the freeing of spirit from flesh.
2. Salvation is attained by teaching revealed truth through "mysteries" which return the individual to pure spirit in stages (mysteries were ceremonies with mystical effects on participants).
3. Christian and Jewish writings are purely allegorical and must be properly interpreted by one with special knowledge to reveal the underlying truth.
4. Other teachings of Jesus exist outside of written Scripture, entrusted to those with the hidden knowledge for transmission orally to deserving initiates.
5. God is not a being with personality but is the all-permeating 1st Principle, 1st Cause and True Love without form.
6. Satan is the God of the Old Testament (called Demiurge) and the creator of the world of matter.
7. Gnosticism minimized the historical elements of Scripture, Christ's actual existence and crucifixion and physical resurrection as a man, the tangible and

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<sup>2</sup> Dualism also refers to existence being ruled by two principles: good and evil. It results in the belief that Satan is equal and opposite to Yahweh. Therefore, God is not sovereign in all matters, because Satan has an exclusive domain of his own.

historical participation of God in the lives of his people individually, and in the life of Israel as a nation.

**Manicheanism** is a form of *Gnosticism*. Augustine was a Manichean for 9 years (374-383). This was a blend of Zoroastrianism and Christianity, borrowing concepts and terminology from both. Manicheans believed that the universe is dominated by two competing forces of good and evil, represented by light and darkness. It taught that the physical world is inherently evil and that salvation is obtained primarily through knowledge. Its founder, Mani, often claimed to be the reincarnation of religious figures such as Jesus or Buddha. Manichaeism did not survive very long.

**Response:** Jer 31.33-34; Mat 11.25; Psa 19.7; Psa 119.105, 130; Prov. 1.23.

"But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. <sup>34</sup> "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' **for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them**, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jer 31:33)

**C. Pantheism** – This term has a number of meanings, literally, “all-God” — all is God, and God is all. In this worldview, “God” is an all-inclusive term describing Nature without personality; or it’s a belief that “God” is that life-force which resides innately in all things, like “the force” in Star Wars.

When Carl Sagan and others speak of the “Cosmos,” or “Mother Nature,” as if it were a god or goddess, that’s pantheism. Substituting the laws of science for God, is a form of pantheism. It equates God with creation; or it places the Creator *within* His Creation, instead of above and outside it.

The term pantheism also applies to those who consider all gods equal, or co-existent. It denies that any god is THE God, even if one is the “chief” god. Greek, Roman, and Norse cultures had a pantheon of gods, with a rich mythology describing them in human terms.

ANIMISM is a form of *pantheism*, in which there is a spirit of each natural object, or a soul in every living creature.

**Response:** “I am the LORD, and *there is no other*; *There is no God besides Me.*” (Isa 45:5) “For thus says the LORD, Who created the heavens, Who is God, Who formed the earth and made it, Who has established it, Who did not create it in vain, Who formed it to be inhabited: “I am the LORD, and *there is no other.*” (Isa 45:18) <sup>NKJ</sup> “Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and *there is no other.* (Isa 45:22)



## HERESIES OPPOSED IN THE EARLY CHURCH

**MARCIONITES** - Marcion was the son of a wealthy bishop and he was raised as a Christian. He went to Rome in 138 or 139 and taught the following:

1. Nature is Dualistic.
2. The God of the Old Testament was evil.
3. There is no secret body of knowledge or allegorical interpretation of Scripture.
4. The Demiurge created men and their souls.
5. A second God, hidden until Christ's coming, is the God of Love.
6. The God of Love undertook to rescue men he didn't create and owed nothing to the Demiurge.
7. The God of Love revealed himself in Jesus who was not born of men through the Demiurge, but was only a phantom who seemed to be a man. This was called **DOCETISM** from the Greek word meaning "to appear."
8. Sexual union was forbidden.
9. Marriage was rejected.
10. Martyrdom was prized.

Marcion was an organizer and gathered his followers into churches. He assembled probably the first authoritative collection of early Christian writings which later came into Eusebius' possession (who provided the only source we have for our knowledge of the first three centuries of the church).

Marcion not only rejected the Old Testament, but much of the New Testament. He saw two different God's described: an angry and vengeful God of the Old, *Jewish* writings, and the loving God of the New, *Christian* writings. But Marcion kept only the Gospel of Luke and the writings of Paul as true. He was an anti-Semite.

*This is a selective approach to Scripture.* It picks and chooses only those portions of the Bible that agree with our pre-conceived notions of the truth. Today's expressions of it include liberalism, neo-evangelicalism, ecumenism, the Emergent Church Movement, opposition to penal substitution, New Perspectives on Paul, Dispensationalism, and Christian *minimalism* — "What's the least I need to believe in order to be a Christian?" Don't confuse that with "What must I believe to be *saved*?" For more information, see Carl Trueman's article:

<https://www.monergism.com/marcions-have-landed-warning-evangelicals>

**MONTANISM** - c.156-172 Montanus was raised in Phrygia in Asia Minor and his movement is sometimes called the "**Phrygian**" movement. Its teachings include,

1. Revival of prophets and new revelation.
2. Asceticism, fasting, celibacy, and martyrdom as path to righteousness.
3. An early end of the world.
4. Imminent second coming of Christ.
5. The New Jerusalem would be an ideal society located ... at Phrygia, of course.
6. Speaking in tongues is the sign of salvation.
7. There will be a millennial reign of Christ (a belief called "Chiliasm").

These teachings are reflected today in "charismania," or Pentecostalism. The Montanists, on the up side, opposed sacerdotalism, and favored independent churches.

**MODALISM** - God emerges from the abstract whole of his being to take on the attributes of a man, father/creator, or Holy Spirit as his present “mode” of being. In other words, God appears or acts in three different modes, revealed one at a time as Father, Son or Holy Spirit; then he returns to his abstract whole. **Sabellius** was a proponent of modalism c. 220. Using the chemical states of liquid, solid, and vapor to describe the Trinity would be modalistic (e.g. water, ice, and steam). Don’t use it. The image of an egg comprised of yolk, white, and shell making up a single entity is likewise flawed because it declares that no person of the Godhead is sufficient of himself to be God; rather each is a portion of God. But the Lord God is One, not several, and not composite.

**SCHISMS** (or splits) -

**A. Novation Schism.** Novatian was a presbyter of the Roman church. His followers voiced dissatisfaction with lax moral practices and with the lenient treatment of those who denied the faith during the persecutions of the church. Novation began a parallel church structure by appointing his own bishops. His opponents included Calistus, Bishop of Rome, who taught that no sin is unforgivable if the sinner is genuinely contrite. Calistus also pointed to the parable of the wheat and the tares to describe the composition of the church as a whole which was not to be pre-judged by its participants. Other famous opponents included Stephen, Bishop of Rome, Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, Clement of Alexandria (-215), and Origen of Alexandria (182-251). Teaching:

1. There is no forgiveness of sins after salvation -OR-
2. There is no forgiveness of “deadly sins” after salvation.

Tertullian defined the seven deadly sins as idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, fornication, false-witness, and fraud. The definition of deadly sins was an instant hit, and everyone began a list of the “big 7.”

**Response:** Scripture teaches there are no better or worse sins (Jas 2:10; *compare* Luk 12:47-48); the unforgivable sin is the blaspheming the Holy Spirit by identifying Him with Satan (Matt.12:24-31) or by worshipping Satan despite complete knowledge of the freedom offered in Christ (Heb.6).

**B. Donatists** – The Carthaginian **rigorists**, who hadn’t backed down during Diocletian’s persecution (c. 303-305), refused to accept the appointment of a new bishop of Carthage by a Roman Pope who had indeed backed down. They called him “traditore” or “hander-over of the Scriptures.” Rather than submit to his rule, the Donatists appointed their own bishop who was succeeded by Donatus in 316, from whom the schism took its name. This resulted in the development of a dual church system with Popes and counter-Popes (or anti-Popes), bishops and counter-bishops.

The Donatist adherents were primarily North African and non-Latin, and the split may well have been exacerbated by racial tension. When the Christian Emperor Constantine called a synod under pressure from the Donatists (who by then had appointed some 270 bishops), those of the “Catholic Church” refused to attend. Constantine tried to compel attendance by force, but then gave up that method. Later, AUGUSTINE tried to act as mediator between the feuding groups, but failed. The Donatists remained independent until the Vandals sacked Rome.

**Purgatory** – because the Donatists remained true to Christ despite torture and death, while others broke under duress and denied Christ, the Donatists demanded that those

who were broken should be excluded from the Church. Pope Gregory I (c. 540) decided to put an end to this dispute between the strong and the weak. He applied purgatory, which was first introduced by Clement of Alexandria (150-215).<sup>3</sup> It would be a place between earth and heaven where those who had denied Christ could do penance and regain their salvation. Over time, this concept came to be a place to do penance for all unrepented sins during this life. It fit nicely into the Catholic doctrine of works.

**ARIANISM** - The Arian controversy lasted from the time of Constantine in 318 until 451 when the COUNCIL OF CHALCEDON finally put it to rest. Arius, a priest in Alexandria, denied the true divinity of Jesus Christ. He taught that the Son was not eternal but was *created* by the Father, and therefore the Son was not God by nature. He had a changeable nature. His honor and dignity were earned from the Father by Jesus' righteous life on earth rather than being inherent in Jesus' identity as God. Jesus was not "consubstantial" with the Father (i.e. of the same substance). The Holy Spirit was begotten by the Logos (Christ) and therefore was less than either the Son or the Father.

Arius' bishop, ALEXANDER, condemned Arius' teachings and defrocked him and his followers. However, Arius had many sympathizers throughout the empire and a major conflict arose. Eusebius writes the dispute was so intense that "the Christian religion afforded a subject of profane merriment to the pagans, even in their theaters." Constantine was upset with both Alexander and Arius. He wrote each of them and said, "There was no need to make these questions public ... since they are problems that idleness alone raises, and whose only use is to sharpen men's wits ... these are silly actions worthy of inexperienced children, and not of priests or reasonable men." Constantine called for the first ecumenical council of the church to resolve the dispute. It met at **Nicea** in 325. The bishops who met there debated the nature of the person of Jesus Christ for over two months. Arius was opposed in the debate by the archdeacon **Athanasius** from Alexandria. Arius lost. The Nicene creed reference to the nature of the person of Jesus Christ reads "being one essence (homousios) with the Father." Arius and his followers were banished from the empire.

Although settled in theory, Constantine wavered on the issue (his sister was an Arian) and he permitted some of the bishops to return from exile in 328. They immediately began a series of political maneuverings that led to the exile of Athanasius in 335, who was then bishop of Alexandria. Arius was declared orthodox and was scheduled for reinstatement in the church when he died in 336. The conflict continued for 150 years.

The final orthodox Nicene formula is this: "The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and from the Son.*" This final phrase "and from the Son" is called the *filioque*.

**Nestorians** – c. 428. Also known as *Adoptionism*. Nestor was from the Antiochene school. He taught that Christ, as man, is the adoptive Son of God, not God incarnate. He had two separate natures. The two natures were united in love but separated in essence. The orthodox position is that Christ is one *person* with two *natures*, one human and one divine. The Nestorian heresy is that Christ comprises two *persons*; one with a human nature, and the other with a divine nature. If there are two distinct persons in Jesus Christ, Mary would be the mother of the human person only. Thus the reference to Mary

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<sup>3</sup> *Patres Graeci*. IX, col. 332. Also Origen, *Commentary on Luke*, 24th Homily, before 253 A.D.

as Mother of God (Theotokos) was anathema to the Nestorians who preferred to refer to Her as “Christotokos” (Mother of Christ). Nestor was opposed by Eusebius.

**Monophysites** – Christ has one predominant nature. Monophysitism developed as a reaction to the dual nature teaching of Nestorianism. It led to the formal secession of the Coptic and Armenian churches from the rest of the Christian church. Although they accepted the formulation of the Nicene Creed, they fought over the way in which divinity and humanity are joined in Christ Jesus. The problem arose when they began to think about the fact that God (and therefore the divine nature of Christ) was unchangeable, immutable and eternal, while human nature is changeable and temporal.

- ANTIOCHIAN Monophysites stressed Christ’s *human nature*, because they believed that Christ needed to be truly human if he were to be the savior of human beings.
- ALEXANDRIAN Monophysites stressed Christ’s *divinity* because he needed to be truly God if he were to teach divine truth.

**PELAGIANISM** – This is a doctrine of works and a rejection of grace. It rejects the idea that man is incapable of doing what God expects in the way of obedience to the Law. c. 400 AD. Pelagius was appalled by the sinfulness in the Church at Rome, which he believed was the natural result of Augustine’s teaching on grace. And so he taught,

1. Man is basically good but morally weak, and thus capable of perfect obedience (this rejects total depravity). God only requires what man is capable of doing.
2. Even if Adam had not sinned, he would have died (the Tree of Life is a metaphor).
3. Adam’s sin harmed only himself, not the human race (no original sin). Therefore, infant baptism is unnecessary to wipe away original sin. Newborns are in the same state as Adam before his fall (innocent).
4. The whole human race neither dies through Adam’s sin and death, nor rises again through the resurrection of Christ (Christ’s death did not atone – it was a sacrificial example).
5. The (Mosaic Law) is as good a guide to heaven as the Gospel (the Law remains). Christ lived in such a way as to provide an example for us.
6. Even before the advent of Christ there were men who were without sin. Christ was not unique; his righteousness is not imputed to us; we earn our own salvation.

Pelagius’ teachings were condemned at the Councils of Carthage (c. 415), Orange (529), Ephesus (431), Trent (1546), and by the Protestants in their Confessions such as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Helvetic, Augsburg, Gallican, and Belgic Confessions, the Anglican Articles, and the Canons of Dort. A milder version will arise in the 1600’s called **Arminianism**.

**MONASTICISM** - As Christianity became more and more the haven of the general population, its standards became more and more subdued. God’s people became displaced by the teeming masses. Two competing philosophies arose that drove believers into monasteries to preserve the original documents and teachings of the church:

1. **antinomianism** (at the far left) taught that the Christian was above the law and beyond mere morality, and could therefore do as he pleased. “Once saved, always saved” was corrupted into “Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we live.”
2. **rigorists** (at the far right) taught with Puritanical fervor, that the perfection of the person and the soul is an attainable goal in this lifetime, and in some versions of their teaching, a goal that could be surpassed. Mere salvation wasn’t enough.

Somewhere between these two extremes came a group of Christian purists who, frustrated by the lack of commitment in the church body, decided to seclude themselves in trial communities called monasteries to work out a formula for Christian living. It quickly degenerated into an escapist retreat on the one hand, and an elitist club on the other. If martyrdom was no longer the mark of someone who had made it, then perhaps a monk's habit and hairdo might be an appropriate alternative, a mark of distinction and apartness --- the sign of someone to be envied but not imitated.

Jeremy Jackson in *No Other Foundation*, points out the underlying dangers of the "monastic solution" to Christian nominalism in these cautions:

1. People, being gregarious by nature, tend to gather together in flocks. Flocks, by identifying themselves distinctly from all other flocks, also tend to exclude all others. They are inherently alienating.
2. A flock tends to feather its own nest, cater to the internal needs of its members, and thereby it tends to "become a service organization, gratifying human egos, human mores, human traditions. The Gospel is adapted to society, instead of society being adapted to the Gospel." (p. 64)
3. "Anyone who takes Jesus' words seriously is thought to be either a fanatic, whose conduct is vaguely threatening, or a super-saint, whose example is not for the likes of us."

Why has the church tended to follow these two tracks of legalism and nominalism? Why does the church compromise so readily and follow secular fads so easily? Jackson tells us, "Just as the secular mind prefers to push Christ aside and talk about Paul or Augustine or Luther, so the ecclesiastical mind, the mind absorbed in the church as a mere institution, is more taken with the thoughts and deeds of churchmen than with the Word of the Founder of the Church.

### **Internal and External Idols**

**MYSTICISM** had become a major force in about 500 when the works of the Greek theologians were published under the pseudonym of "Dionysius the Areopagite." They were probably developed in the MONOPHYSITE circles of Syria. They gained wide acceptance as sub-apostolic expositions of how the celestial hierarchy of God and the angels was related to the ecclesiastical hierarchy of bishops and priests with their sacraments. The writings of Dionysius formed the basis for the thought of BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX and THOMAS AQUINAS. This period therefore not only knit East and West together, but also past and present.

**ICONOCLASTS** – the church adopts the use of icons, statues, stained glass, and story-laden pictures to further the teachings of the church in a world that cannot read or write. They soon fall into misuse and are treated as holy objects, worthy of worship in themselves – the representation becomes the object.

**THE CHURCH AS STATE** – In 380, Christianity became the official religion of Rome. When the force of Visigoths led by Alaric took and sacked Rome in 410, and when in 430 (as Augustine lay dying in Hippo) the Vandals besieged the city, it was just the beginning of 600 years of barbarian invasions. Rome was no longer the center of world power. It changed to Constantinople. A political power vacuum emerged. The church became the only organized institution capable of exercising civil dominion over a large territory.



## HERESIES THAT BECAME ORTHODOXY

Gregory referred to himself as “the servant of the servants of God.” To Gregory, as it was to Augustine, pride is a vicious hound that dogs us relentlessly, that “raises itself up against all the members of the soul, and as a universal death and disease corrupts the whole body.”<sup>4</sup>

Gregory incorporated into church theology, not only the teachings of the early fathers which he passed on to the church of the middle ages, but also the superstitions and pagan beliefs of the common populace. Once formulated, this body of theology became orthodoxy for subsequent theologians and bishops. For example:

**Sacerdotalism** – Separating clergy and laity, rejecting the priesthood of all believers. In the Lord’s Supper, the wine was reserved for priests alone, as a mark of distinction. From this separation came INDULGENCES, PRIESTLY INTERCESSION, the CONFSSIONAL BOOTH, and IMPUTATION of righteousness from a *priest*, instead of from *Christ alone*.

**Imputed Sin and Free Will** – Adam’s fall only weakened our freedom of will. Therefore under grace we may win merit for ourselves by good works.

**Repentance** – For sins committed after baptism the process of forgiveness involves remorse, confession and then meritorious works. The greater the sin, the greater the need for penitence, or paying back. Whether it is enough remains a mystery till death.

**Intercession of the Saints** – Because the effectiveness of our penance is unknown, we may appeal to past saints for intercession on our behalf with Christ. Gregory did not originate this belief, but he did ratify it.

**Holy Relics** – Saints’ and Martyrs’ locks of hair, finger nails, toes, garments etc. were believed to have great power especially for defense against evil.

**Pilgrimages** – This was in aid of searching for holy relics, holy water from a fountain in Jerusalem, resulting in idolatry or an excessive reverence of earthly places. This opposes Jesus’ caution in Joh 4.21-24, “The hour is coming when you will worship neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, ...but in spirit and truth.”

**Purgatory** – A middle ground to finish sanctification after death if full penance had not been made in this life.

**Eucharist** – The bread and wine were “transubstantiated” or transmuted into the actual blood and flesh of Christ. The meal was seen as a sacrifice offered by the priest for the sins of men – not the same as Christ’s sacrifice for all his people – but for the post-baptismal sins of its participants, or for those who had already departed and were in purgatory (it provided an early release).

In all of these things, we see a passion to “do” for God, for self, and for others. It is a compulsion to gain worth, and accrue merit – to become deserving of God’s great gift. And it seems that all of this is a consequence of guilt rather than thankfulness for freedom from God’s wrath. This misperception of God’s grace colors church theology for the next 1,000 years. AND for the next 1000 years, the church retained political as well as spiritual control over the world – until King Henry VIII challenged the Romish Pope and won.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 186.

This stimulated corrective action within and against the Roman Church by the Protestants Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli. The **Reformation** had begun. What were its obstacles?

### **THE CHURCH AS AN IDOL**

While the church held its power and control, church offices were highly prized. Those who attained those positions wielded enormous influence, and gained enormous wealth. But the power and wealth of the church intoxicated, and corrupted. It led to abuses, doctrinal error, persecutions, and abominations. The church became an engine of war and domination, because its leadership was un-Christian. It had become a civic institution. In the late 1700's, America chose to separate church and state because of those historic abuses, and it was the churchmen of America who pushed for that separation. It wasn't that they opposed the church influencing and participating in the state; they opposed the state influencing and participating in the church. That was what they saw as the cause of the church's corruption for a thousand years.

## FAITH AND REASON

**SCHOLASTICISM** - Universities arose in the 12th and 13th centuries as associations or guilds of teachers with theology as their major subject. Paris became a leading university as did Bologna. They were chartered from the Pope and pursued the relation of faith and reason. The questions they sought answers to were like these:

1. Is God's revelation that culminated in Christ consistent with reason? Or are the two contradictory?
2. If the two are compatible, which should have priority, the faith which is the basis of Christian commitment, or man's reason?
3. Can reason demonstrate as true what the Christian believes about God?
4. If it cannot, does what is received by faith complement what is reached by reason, or do the two contradict each other?
5. If reason seems to deny what the Christian accepts on faith as given by God, should he follow reason and discard faith, or can he find some way to hold to both?

The method used by Scholasticism to reach answers to these questions was Aristotelian logic (if, then, else, therefore) and the dialectic of Plato's Socrates (leading the listener to a conclusion by a series of probing questions). To acquaint themselves with the Greek philosophers the Scholastics used the only texts they had, the Latin materials available in the monastic libraries. They began to search out original Greek works or alternative translations from Persia, where the **Nestorian** heretics had left them in 400. They began to attend Moslem schools which carried Syriac translations and Arab schools in Spain where Jews, Christians and Moslems studied together. The Eastern theology of Constantinople was encountered and brought to the West this "new wave" theology.

**A. Realism** - Plato declared that words or phrases which describe "universals" have an independent existence from the individual units which comprise them. We have coined the phrase, "the whole is more than the sum of its parts" to describe this approach. As applied to theology this would mean that mankind as a whole has been corrupted by the sin of Adam. The saving work of Christ is for mankind as a whole and not for isolated individual men. The church is more than the sum of individual Christians or local congregations.

**B. Nominalism** - This school of thought maintains that only particular things are real and universals are merely words coined by the intellect. Terms such as mankind, city, nation, animal and church are concepts of the mind. Only individual objects and events exist. Men, seeing what they believe to be resemblances between objects, invent abstract terms to group individual objects together. Likewise, the Trinity must refer to three individual gods no matter what concept we try to link them with.

**THE NEED FOR REFORM** – Martin Luther, in 1517, nailed his famous 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Chapel in hopes of having a debate on some questionable church teaching and practices. By the time the dust settled, the Roman Catholic Church would never be the same. The essence of the charges fall into 5 battle cries known as the **Solas**:

- **Sola Scriptura** – the standard of truth is the Bible alone, not the church, not the Pope
- **Solus Christus** – salvation is by Christ alone, not by sacraments, not by priests
- **Sola Gratia** – salvation is by grace alone, not by works, not by penance
- **Sola Fide** – salvation is by faith alone, not by faith plus anything else
- **Soli Deo Gloria** – everything we do is for the Glory of God alone; everything that has been done for us by God is for God’s glory alone; nothing we do merits God’s grace.

**ARMINIANISM** – c. 1610 There are a number of similarities between ARMINIANISM and PELAGIANISM (Arminianism is sometimes called SEMI-PELAGIANISM). Arminius was a Calvinist who challenged the extent of the atonement, believing that Christ died for the whole world, and that man had free will capable of accepting or rejecting God’s grace. This was in opposition to Augustine’s teaching that Calvin had accepted. After Arminius died, his followers developed the five points of Arminianism in a remonstrance or list of objections to Calvinism. And so they were called the Remonstrants. The followers of Calvin and Augustine responded with their own Five points of Calvinism (100 years after Calvin). The Arminian points are these:

**1. Free-Will or Human Ability** - Although human nature was seriously affected by the Fall, man has not been left in a state of total spiritual helplessness. God graciously enables every sinner to repent and believe, but He does not interfere with man’s freedom. Each sinner possesses a free will, and his eternal destiny depends on how he uses it. Man’s freedom consists of his ability to choose good over evil in spiritual matters; his will is not enslaved to his sinful nature. The sinner has the power to either cooperate with God’s Spirit and be regenerated or resist God’s grace and perish. The lost sinner needs the Spirit’s assistance, but he does not have to be regenerated by the Spirit before he can believe, for faith is man’s act and precedes the new birth. Faith is the sinner’s gift to God; it is man’s contribution to salvation.

**2. Conditional Election** - God’s choice of certain individuals to be saved, made before the foundation of the world, was based upon His foreseeing that they would respond to His call. He selected only those whom He knew would of themselves freely believe the gospel. Election therefore was determined by or conditioned upon what man would do. The faith which God foresaw and upon which He based His choice was not given to the sinner by God (it was not created by the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit) but resulted solely from man’s will. It was left entirely up to man as to who would believe and therefore as to who would be elected unto salvation. God chose those whom He knew would, of their own free will, choose Christ. Thus the sinner’s choice of Christ, not God’s choice of the sinner, is the ultimate cause of salvation.

**3. Universal Redemption or General Atonement** - Christ's redeeming work made it possible for everyone to be saved, but did not actually secure the salvation of anyone. Although Christ died for all men and for every man, only those who believe on Him are saved. His death enabled God to pardon sinners on the condition that they believe, but it did not actually put away anyone's sins. Christ's redemption becomes effective only if man chooses to accept it.

**4. The Holy Spirit Can Be Effectually Resisted** - The Spirit calls inwardly all those who are called outwardly by the gospel invitation; He does all that He can to bring every sinner to salvation. But inasmuch as man is free, he can successfully resist the Spirit's call. The Spirit cannot regenerate the sinner until he believes; faith (which is man's contribution) proceeds and makes possible the new birth. Thus, man's free will limits the Spirit in the application of Christ's saving work. The Holy Spirit can only draw to Christ those who allow Him to have His way with them. Until the sinner responds, the Spirit cannot give life. God's grace, therefore, is not invincible; it can be, and often is, resisted and thwarted by man.

**5. Falling from Grace** - Those who believe and are truly saved can lose their salvation by failing to keep up their faith, etc. All Arminians have not been agreed on this point; some have held that believers are eternally secure in Christ - that once a sinner is regenerated, he can never be lost.

Arminianism is often called SEMI-PELAGIANISM. It was rejected by every major voice of the Reformation, and every major confession. It found its modern voice in John Wesley, and then became popularized during the Revivals of the 1880's (Charles Finney), especially among the populist Baptists and Methodists.

*Here is a comparison of three incorrect views of man's role in salvation:*

PELAGIANISM: God chose those whom He saw beforehand would accept His grace.

SEMI-PELAGIANISM: Salvation is partly God's mercy and partly our works.

LUTHERANISM: God chose some, but rejected those whom he foresaw would reject Him.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kleyn and Beeke, *Reformation Heroes* (Reform. Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, 2009), p. 169.



## SECULAR REACTION TO CHRISTENDOM

For a millennium, the church of *Christendom* under Roman Catholicism and the Holy Roman Empire – was a political order. It invaded the domain of the state in order to carry the sword. It used the state's power to achieve its earthly ends, and it also accumulated its own power and money – even armies – to lord it over the nations.

When Protestantism severed itself from Rome, it favored worldly princes and turned to them for protection. But when Protestantism splintered into national churches, and then into a myriad of denominations and independent churches, it again became a target. The kings and princes of the world, having been freed from their bondage to Rome, sought to exercise the sort of authority over their people, *and* their churches, that Rome had exercised. This consequences for the churches of Europe were dire. But in America, separating church from state provided a period of what the churches thought would be “safety.” The church had *insulated* itself from the state.

However, in time, lacking cohesive power and a coherent voice, the church became *excluded* from the state, and then from the culture. It was *not* a victim. By its actions and inactions, the church insulated *itself* from both.

**THE ENLIGHTENMENT** – Scholasticism and the Reformation had opened the door to philosophy and institutional change for the West. Once that door was opened, the *Age of Reason* had dawned. It held to the supremacy of the human mind over myth, superstition, and revelation. The world divided into 3 groups in the 1600's:

- **Traditionalists** who clung to their Catholic religious heritage;
- **Reformists** who opposed more than they upheld, and so they were labelled “protestants”
- **Separatists** who rejected God altogether in favor of humanism and human reason.

It is this third group (Separatists) that the Enlightenment or **MODERNITY** sprung from. Its assumptions are:

1. Human Autonomy - meaning and morality can be discovered within the bounds of natural reason without any reference to God.
2. Inevitable Progress - every day, in every way, we're getting better and better.
3. Knowledge is *always* good, and therefore must be obtained at any cost
4. Knowledge results in control over our environment, which is our salvation
5. Righteousness is found in developing and enforcing social and political solutions

**SECULARISM** – There are two spheres of human activity, one public, the other private. Religion must remain in the private sphere. Therefore, the Church should have no role in the public sphere, no voice in the marketplace of ideas. The public sphere should not attempt to control the content of the private sphere. This is separation of church and state taken to an extreme.

**SCIENTISM** – Science is no longer just a technique or a means of acquiring accurate knowledge about our physical world. It has become the altar on which mankind must place its sacrifices of time, money, study, and devotion. It is the means of our ultimate salvation and survival, the only standard of truth and light in a dark world. And its priests are our scientists, who will dispense the truth they serve to a witless, ignorant, and superstitious generation. We devote our children to its service.

And Science is no longer limited to the physical sciences, or technical fields, but has now branched out to include history, philosophy, psychology, education, and sociology. Its teachings are promoted through our school curricula, books, and mass media. Heresy is defined as whatever contradicts current scientific orthodoxy – in other words, Science has replaced the church, making it redundant and disposable, along with its priesthood. There is no sin, only misperception. There is no absolute truth apart from what scientists declare it to be; in the social sciences, the opinions of the “scientists” trump all other opinions. Their “testimony” is therefore unassailable in any court in the land. But the testimony of a Christian about right relationships, founded on the biblical text instead of an authorized textbook, is a fiction, an unlicensed intrusion on the protected and sanctioned territory of Science. Science is the final arbiter of truth; it is the civil religion of our time.

**DARWINISM** – going beyond the teachings of Charles Darwin and Science, this defines a mechanistic universe in which there can be no God. The mechanism is God: impersonal, indifferent. Like Pelagianism, mankind is evolving ever better with each generation, without a corrupt nature, capable of being educated out of its “sickness” and selfishness. Man is not at all dead in his sin. Nor is he unique in his divinity (he is not made in the image of God). He is just another creature on the planet with no more rights, privileges, or superiority than a cockroach might have.

**CULTISM** – In the early 1800s, there was a tremendous rise in cults. Mainstream or “orthodox religion” was supplanted by science and technology. Into the religious vacuum arise the following, all in a mere half-century, from 1827 to 1883:

Plymouth Brethren and Dispensationalism (John Darby), Mormonism (Joseph Smith), the Oxford Movement in England (Keble), the Holiness Movement (Mahan), Higher Criticism and dawn of Liberalism (Schleiermacher), Millerism, Christian Existentialism (Kierkegaard), Marxism, Perfectionist Movement, Immaculate Conception, Darwinism, and Seventh-Day Adventists (Ellen White). Nietzsche’s *Superman* is born of Darwinism; The ideas of *Superman* lead to Hitler, Planned Parenthood, and Genetic engineering.

**POST-MODERNISM** – After World Wars I and II, and the atrocities of the last century, it became clear that the ideals of the Enlightenment were false. There is no such thing as truth or progress, we are told. Truth is relative, subjective, limited, and transitory. Life is to be lived in the private sphere. We have restricted connectivity to others through public spheres such as job, school, and politics. In the public sphere we must not impose our views on others (see *Secularism* above). All views are equally valid. The only shared truth we have is vicarious. Its images are conveyed to us through television and other media. These provide us with our image of reality, ala George Orwell’s *1984*, or Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*. And yet we strive to don that publicly projected and acceptable image, by adorning ourselves with its icons: the right clothing, makeup, consumables, homes, cars, etc. We are driven to conform this way in order to gain acceptance, to participate in that larger community. The images have been designed by folks who are unknown, unelected, and unaccountable to us, who themselves are at the mercy of corporate employers and Stockholders. They pander to whatever draws our attention: sex, violence, greed. The source of culture, the values of our community, have been so splintered that there is no longer a standard of right and wrong, biblical or otherwise. We are lost among the trees in a forest filled with alleged truth, searching for our own personal path to bliss. After all, there are many roads to heaven.

## MODERN HERESIES AND ERRORS

MARCION simply threw out those parts of Scripture he believed to be corrupted. Today, the liberal critics do essentially the same thing when they attempt to separate the “authentic sayings of Jesus” from the sayings His disciples supposedly put on His lips. Of course, the critics’ edits are based on their own preconceived notions, including their tendency to rule out the existence of the supernatural. Thus, neither Christ’s miracles nor His resurrection could have occurred.

But softer forms of Marcionism have also appeared in modern times. Many hyper-dispensationalists accept the Old and New Testaments, but they divide the contents of Scripture in such a way as to make only a small part of it applicable to Christians. They establish a radical discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments and between Israel and the church. Some go so far as to declare that only certain of Paul’s writings pertain to Christians today.

We also see softer forms of ANTINOMIANISM today. The “once saved, always saved” advocates do not deliberately encourage sinful behavior, but their teaching that sinful behavior on the part of a true Christian can never sever his relationship with God is, nevertheless, a form of antinomianism.

A form of antinomianism is also seen in the view that the believer now relies completely on the influence and promptings of the Holy Spirit, and has no need of biblical law to inform him on godly behavior. This view resembles yet another form of antinomianism—the view that replaces biblical commandments with the sentiment of “love.” The result is that sentiment (often called “love”) takes precedence over the plain commandments of God, resulting in “justification” for all kinds of immoral behavior—couples living together as if married, so-called gay marriage, and euthanasia. Even taking a pro-abortion (“pro-choice”) stance is seen as “loving,” as it is opposed to those mean old Bible-thumping “fundamentalists” who oppose “reproductive rights” and “choice.”

And then there are the modern MODALISTS who, like the modalists of old, make God a solitary Person who operates through three modes; the modern Arians and adoptionists, who strip Christ of His full divinity and make Him a part of creation; the modern MONTANISTS, noted for their emphasis on ecstatic prophecy and ecstatic utterance, or “speaking in tongues”; the modern GNOSTICS, who blend Christian beliefs with New Age spirituality; and on it goes.

### **An Old Admonition—Still Good for Today**

There can be no doubt that the Christianity that has come down to us was in many ways shaped by the torrent of heresies, cultural influences, and theological disputes that have come and gone over the centuries. But—make no mistake—yesterday’s heresies never really went away. They have simply been brushed up a bit and repackaged—but they’re still with us. For this reason, the people of God today would do well to heed an old—but not outdated—admonition:

“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to *contend earnestly* for the faith which was once delivered to the saints” (**Jude 1:3**)

<http://cgi.org/heresies-ancient-and-modern/>

**The EMERGENT CHURCH MOVEMENT** is essentially POSTMODERNISM, desiring to set aside established doctrine, in order to “rediscover” it afresh, without the bias of tradition. But in the re-examination of what’s been received, old heresies can be reborn, and new heresies created. “Guard what has been entrusted to you.” (1Tim 6.20)

**LIBERATION THEOLOGY.** One type of this theology is nothing more than “christian Marxism,” with Jesus Christ as a political and economic activist. It seeks worldly solutions to a spiritual disease, and its promised cure is therefore an earthly cure: temporary, corrupted, and inadequate. It may seek to overthrow tyranny by force, only to install Marxist tyranny in its place. It justifies it under a principle of biblical justice, where the liberators serve as the right hand of God. Another type imitates the SOCIAL GOSPEL of Liberalism. It pursues social, moral, political, and economic justice, with the church advocating for the poor and afflicted in society. Tied to this we may find advocacy for feminism, gay rights, immigrants, migrant workers, etc.

**Response:** John 8:36; Gal 3.28.

**LIBERALISM.** J. Gresham Machen called Liberalism “another religion,” not Christianity. It seeks to reconcile Christianity with science, typically rejecting the resurrection, Christ’s virgin birth, and miracles. It raises pseudo-science (sociology, psychology, etc.) to the level of testable science, which may be reasoned by man’s mind alone. They are reserved to self-professed experts. Thus pastors must be licensed by the state to counsel members of their congregation with the truth of Scripture. Reason is the measure of truth and morality, while religion apart from reason is mythology, superstitious, and irrational. Liberalism rejects the authority of God, and the authority of Scripture. This is the Marcionites again. Liberalism opposes the historic creeds as suspect. It substitutes a life lived, for the biblical truth which governs that life. Man’s reason, of course, is the domain solely of the intellectual elite, the GNOSTICS of our time, who will tell us what is true – for they claim to be the only ones who know it. It is a SOCIALIST system that limits individual liberty. Liberalism, like the early JUDAIZERS, teaches that salvation comes by belief in Christ, followed by works, and *then* by justification. It is works without wonder. It is obedience without submission.

**Response:** Isa 55.9; Col 2.8.

**SOCIAL GOSPEL** – This was a movement led by a group of liberal Protestant progressives in response to the social problems raised by the rapid industrialization, urbanization, and increasing immigration of the Gilded Age (1870s-1910). The social gospel differentiated itself from earlier Christian reform movements by prioritizing social salvation over individual salvation. Although the ministers and activists of the social gospel based their appeals on LIBERAL THEOLOGY, which emphasized the immanence of God and the doctrine of Incarnation and valued good works over creeds, they usually showed more interest in social science than in theology. Believing that laissez-faire capitalism’s understanding of labor as a commodity and its sole reliance on mechanisms of supply and demand to determine wages and allocate resources was un-Christian, social gospel advocates supported the labor movement and called for an interventionist welfare state. They differed from secular activists in that their ultimate vision was not just a more equitable balance of power within society, but a Christianized society in which cooperation, mutual respect, and compassion replaced greed, competition, and conflict among social and economic classes. Despite all of their efforts to reach the working class and to cooperate

with the labor movement, though, the social gospel failed to reach far beyond its middle-class liberal Protestant milieu. Ultimately, the greatest achievement of the social gospel was to prepare the ground of middle-class America for progressivism [political solutions]. <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3401803915.html>

**Response:** Mt. 10.37; Mk 14.7; Gal 6.10; 1Joh 2.15, 3.17; Jas 1.27.

**OPEN-THEISM** – Also known as "Openness of God," and "free-will theism." It comes from Clark H. Pinnock and his associates. The basic premise is that the traditional view of God as immutable, sovereign, and omniscient is seriously flawed. They believe that God's immutability is restricted to His character and ultimate plans. He did not "unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass" and He does not know "whatsoever may or can come to pass." He has chosen to limit himself with regards to His sovereignty and omniscience at creation, and has given man the freedom and power to choose his own destiny. Accordingly, they believe that what the Bible teaches about predestination concerns only final goals and purposes of God. What happens between is neither within God's control nor foreknowledge. God can be surprised by what happens! A believer reading the Scripture cannot arrive at such an anthropocentric conception of God, without pre-conceived notions of human autonomy and sovereignty. It is ancient PELAGIANISM wearing new clothes; it is nothing more than LIBERALISM in disguise.

**Response:** Isa 46.10; Col 1.16-17; Rev 19.6.

**FUTURE GRACE OR LORDSHIP SALVATION** adds works to faith in a supposedly biblical way: God's foreknowledge looks forward to our obedience, then God justifies us accordingly. This is a form of Amaryldianism, and it's circular reasoning. It makes God dependent on our actions, before He will justify us.

**Response:** Joh 1. 13, We "were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God;" also Jo 3.3, 6: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God... That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." We cannot be born of the flesh by our own works, so as to be born of God by the Spirit. These are mutually exclusive states and conditions.

**AUBURN AVENUE OR FEDERAL VISION theology.** One origin is the doctrine of justification by faith *and* works – an open, blatant, and unambiguous attack on justification by sovereign grace alone. This heresy was proposed by Norman Shepherd when he was a professor in WTS Phila., in the late Seventies and early Eighties. It finally ended in his resignation, but his views were never officially condemned. Westminster remains today a center for the propagation of the heresy.

Dr. Klaas Schilder contributed to Federal Vision with his view of a *conditional* covenant. The covenant of grace, in keeping with the notion of a covenant of works, was a pact or agreement between God and man that depended for its adoption and maintenance on a number of promises, conditions, and threats. It included the idea that all the children who were baptized were included in the covenant, and received the promise of God that they would be saved—but on condition that they would, in the future, accept the provisions of the covenant. The Federal Vision theology carries out conditional salvation to its extreme.

If the covenant is conditional, it is conditional because it is established with more people than are actually saved. And this is what the promoters of the Federal Vision maintain. Dr. Schilder taught that baptism was a sign and seal of the covenant, and that God

therefore established His covenant with every baptized child. Dr. Schilder and his followers today are adamant about separating God's *electing determination* of His people, from the *covenant*. The men of the Federal Vision go beyond Schilder. They take the position that all born within covenant lines are elect — really, fully, completely. They are regenerated, converted, justified, and sanctified, and are objects of saving grace. This is a doctrine of justification by faith and works. That is Roman Catholic theology, c. 1517, which undoes the Reformation.

To adopt the views of the Federal Vision is to repudiate every one of the five points of Calvinism, points laid down carefully by the great Synod of Dordt. For a particular, sovereign, and efficacious decree of election, the defenders of the heresy of the Federal Theology opt for the damnable Arminian doctrine of a universal and conditional election. For the doctrine of total depravity, the Federal Vision people teach that man has a free will and can do works by his own power and the power of a free will. For particular redemption, we are now confronted with the age-old heresy of a universal atonement. If all baptized children have salvation in fact, this is because Christ died for them all. The church has fought for a particular atonement in vain if these views are accepted. Instead of irresistible grace, we are told that grace is resistible, for all baptized children receive grace, but some successfully resist it. And no longer can the believer find refuge in the doctrine of the preservation of the saints, for he may once have been elect, once regenerated, once justified; but he has no guarantee that he shall remain such. All hangs on his own obedience and good works. God's everlasting covenant of grace, the one unifying truth of the gospel and the over-arching doctrine of salvation, becomes a mere conditional agreement dependent on our faithfulness and willingness to fulfill the conditions of it.

**Response:** This is Arminianism, refuted by the Canons of Dordt, Art. 9.

**NEW PERSPECTIVES ON PAUL** – Paul is unmistakably clear that *justification is by faith alone*. If Federal Vision and other works-based theologies are to be accepted, something must be done about Paul. And so what is called "A New Perspective on Paul" is promoted. The leading figure in this effort to get rid of Paul is a British theologian, N. T. Wright. He has invented the novel theory that Paul was not writing against justification by faith and works, but was rather combating a Jewish heresy that sought salvation in the works of the law. Paul's fierce denunciation of justification by faith and works, as well as his repeated insistence that justification is by faith alone, was simply a refutation of Jewish legalism. James in his epistle, Wright claims, sets the balance right when James tells us that both Abraham and Rahab were justified by works.

The new perspective on Paul is born out of a higher critical view of Scripture that is destructive of God's Word and insidiously deceptive. We reject its higher critical view as heresy. The way is paved for a return to Rome, something many Protestants have already done. If justification is not by faith alone, then the protestant churches can find no reason not to apologize to Rome for the sins of the sixteenth century, and to rush back into the embrace of the pope.

*Notes on Federal Vision and New Perspectives, are from two articles by Herman Hanko:*

<http://www.prca.org/resources/publications/articles/itemlist/tag/Federal%20Vision>  
<http://www.prca.org/resources/publications/articles/item/4116-modern-heresies-federal-vision-2>

## SECULARISM IN THE CHURCH

In addition to repackaging old heresies, and the rise of the philosophical religions that we saw in the last chapter, we find other weeds growing in the Garden of God today:

The PROSPERITY GOSPEL (that is, *materialism*), a cult of ENTERTAINMENT, MEDIA-WORSHIP, SELF-WORSHIP, EMPEROR-WORSHIP (dictators, presidents, kings, etc.), CELEBRITY WORSHIP, and ESCAPISM (modern monasticism, drug abuse, fantasy games, mob-mentality, etc.).

There is a drive either to be told what to do by others, or to tell others what to do. The Internet and social media only feed the frenzy to worship or be worshipped. Instead of taking responsibility for our own thoughts, speech, and action, and pursuing objective truth, there's a tendency toward designer religion, fringe ideas, and subjectivism. The "me" generation (self-absorbed and anti-authoritarian) lives with the "me too" generation (which is submissive to a fault: "tell me what to think").

This makes the times ripe for tyranny and deception, where truth is what you make of it, and any truth is equally valid. Self-definition has arisen in gender politics, with a demand for adherence to elitist-defined ideals. Any disagreement with the elites of whichever faction yells the loudest, brings a charge of HERESY! The same groups who oppose religion enforce their rules and ideals with a religious fervor that is virulent, and often violent.

Freedom of speech and religion are portrayed as hate speech and hate crimes. What was orthodox is now heretical, and heresy has become the new orthodoxy. It's not about a political ideology, with a liberal "left" seeking change or liberty from the constraints of the past, opposing a conservative "right" defending the old ways with entrenched power. What we're seeing is more nihilistic (nothing matters), and anarchistic (tear it all down).

John Lennon's song *Imagine* has captured the "imagination" of a disgusted and nihilistic generation – and many Christians! "Imagine there's no heaven; It's easy if you try; No hell below us; Above us only sky; Imagine all the people living for today; Imagine there's no countries; It isn't hard to do; Nothing to kill or die for; And no religion too." They've made *that* their religion, and they can't see the irony or idolatry of it. It's MARXIST UTOPIANISM.

They don't know history, or believe history, because they're convinced history is written by those in power: it doesn't truthfully portray historical events or personalities. It may therefore be rewritten or reinterpreted however they like. And so they have rewritten the history of the Church, turning it from a panorama of liberty and justice under God, to bondage and injustice under men. Orthodoxy and Heresy, in their estimation, are equally repugnant. They are simply means to control and manipulate the minds and wills of others, not to serve them, nor exemplify to them what true freedom looks like for *all*.

Christ is divorced from the Church in their minds, because that has so often been done by the Church of CHRISTENDOM. Jesus becomes a moral man, not a Savior of mankind; and the Church remains a villain. If we are to purify the Church, in its doctrines and practices, it must be done publicly – in the sight of men as well as God. We must be proclaimers and doers of God's truth. That's why we must oppose heresy of *every kind*; and why we must ensure that we know what God's truth is.

Most of mankind worships what's *within*, or what's *without*, but not what's *above*. Theirs is an ABC religion – **A**nthing **B**ut **C**hrist. Nothing has changed since the beginning...

**VARIATIONS ON A THEME.** Some theologies modify the Gospel in such a way that, from a reformed perspective, they're not biblically sound – but are still “Christian.” It may look like Wesleyan Arminianism, in which our will plays a part in our justification. It may have some attributes of the Holiness Movement – as if we don't need Christ after justification because we've been sufficiently “cured” to continue on our own. It may claim that we're born again by God's sovereign will, but we must *maintain* our salvation by our works. All of these are aberrations – twistings away from the Gospel of grace. Here's an example.

**THE KESWICK MOVEMENT.** What is “let-go-and-let-God” theology? It's called Keswick theology, and it's one of the most significant strands of SECOND-BLESSING THEOLOGY. It assumes that Christians experience two “blessings.” The first is getting “saved,” and the second is getting serious. The change is dramatic: from a defeated life to a victorious life; from a lower life to a higher life; from a shallow life to a deeper life; from a fruitless life to a more abundant life; from being “carnal” to being “spiritual”; and from merely having Jesus as your Savior to making Jesus your Master. People experience this second blessing through surrender and faith: “Let go and let God.”

Keswick theology comes from the early Keswick movement. Keswick (pronounced KEH-zick) is a small town in the scenic Lake District of northwest England. Since 1875, it has hosted a weeklong meeting in July for the Keswick Convention. The movement's first generation (about 1875– 1920) epitomized what we still call “Keswick theology” today.

People who influenced Keswick theology include John Wesley, Charles Finney, and Hannah Whitall Smith. Significant proponents of Keswick theology include Evan H. Hopkins (Keswick's formative theologian), H. Moule (Keswick's scholar and best theologian), F. B. Meyer (Keswick's international ambassador), Andrew Murray (Keswick's foremost devotional author), J. Hudson Taylor and Amy Carmichael (Keswick's foremost missionaries), Frances Havergal (Keswick's hymnist), and W. H. Griffith Thomas, and Robert C. McQuilkin (leaders of the victorious life movement). People who were influenced by Keswick theology include leaders of the Christian and Missionary Alliance (A. B. Simpson), Moody Bible Institute (D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey), and Dallas Seminary (Lewis Chafer and Charles Ryrie).

Beginning in the 1920s, the Keswick Convention's view of sanctification began to shift from the view promoted by the leaders of the early convention. William Scroggie (1877– 1958) led that transformation to a view of sanctification closer to the Reformed view. The official Keswick Convention that now hosts the annual Keswick conferences holds a Reformed view of sanctification and invites speakers who are confessionally reformed.

Keswick theology is pervasive because countless people have propagated it in so many ways, especially in sermons and devotional writings. It is appealing because Christians struggle with sin and want to be victorious in that struggle now. Keswick theology offers a quick fix, and its shortcut to instant victory appeals to genuine longings for holiness. Keswick theology, however, is not biblically sound. Here are just a few of the reasons why:

1. **Disjunction:** It creates two categories of Christians. This is the fundamental, linchpin issue.
2. **Perfectionism:** It portrays a shallow and incomplete view of sin in the Christian life.
3. **Quietism:** It tends to emphasize passivity, not activity.

4. **Pelagianism:** It tends to portray the Christian's free will as autonomously starting and stopping sanctification.
5. **Methodology:** It tends to use superficial formulas for instantaneous sanctification.
6. **Impossibility:** It tends to result in disillusionment and frustration for the "have-nots."
7. **Spin:** It tends to misinterpret personal experiences.

You can tell that Keswick theology has influenced people when you hear a Christian "testimony" like this: "I was saved when I was eight years old, and I surrendered to Christ when I was seventeen."

By "saved," they mean that Jesus became their Savior and that they became a Christian. By "surrendered," they mean that they gave full control of their lives to Jesus as their Master, yielded to do whatever He wanted them to do, and "dedicated" themselves through surrender and faith. That two-tiered view of the Christian life is *Let-Go-and-Let-God theology*.

<http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/why-let-go-and-let-god-bad-idea/>

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