

THE HISTORY OF CALVINISM

Introduction

1. The Medieval Catholic Church touched and dominated every thread of the fabric of life during the Middle Ages: the Church was everything, and those not a part of the Church were nothing. It was this kind of dominance that contributed to the power and abuse of power against which serious religionists began to rebel. A number of men in the Roman Catholic Church began seeing faults which they protested, thus paving the way for Martin Luther and other later reformers.

2. Corruption in the priesthood and abuse of papal authority generated most of the protests of the Protestant Reformation leaders. Another area of protest centered on the Bible's being the exclusive province of the Church, thus not available to people in general. This exclusive property was maintained by the use of the Latin language in the Bible (not understandable to the masses of members), by the right of priests alone to interpret the Scriptures, and by the chaining of the Bible to the pulpit in a number of cases. The dogma of transubstantiation was another "sore spot" for many, because it insisted on a change in the substance of the bread and the wine. The system of grace taught by the Church was a large problem, including its assertion of a treasury of merit, consisting of works of supererogation, supplied by Christ's meritorious work and the meritorious deeds of the saints. Grace was dispensed from this treasury by means of the seven sacraments (baptism, confirmation, holy Eucharist, penance, matrimony, holy orders, extreme unction); by means of sacramentals (actions or objects used in conjunction with the sacraments) like holy water, blessed ashes, sign of the cross, priestly blessing, rosary, and candles; and by means of the grant of indulgences (remission of temporal punishment due for sins, granted after the guilt of sin and its eternal punishment are remitted by sacramental absolution or by perfect contrition), which were sold during the Middle Ages.

I. *Rumblings against Rome* (Anticipated and inspired Reformation leaders by pointing to ideal of church in NT, though they remained in the Catholic fold)

A. William of Occam (1280—1349) stressed the individual over the institution and undermined the authority of the Church as a rationally derived institution.

B. John Wycliffe (1320-1384), the "Morning Star of the Reformation," opposed immoral priests, papal authority, and the dogma of transubstantiation; and he produced the Bible in the native tongue and established the Lollards (lay preachers) to spread his message.

C. John Huss (1369-1415) adopted the ideas of Wycliffe, arousing papal enmity; he was burned at the stake. He and Wycliffe were heretics for insisting on Bible as first authority.

D. Savonarola (1452-1498) led reforms in the church in Florence, and he was hanged for preaching against the evil life of the pope.

II. Renaissance (Southern-interest in Bible/Christianity; Northern-interest in Greek/Roman classics)

A. Printing press

B. Humanism (returning to ancient sources, including Greek and Hebrew texts of Bible)

C. Historical & Literary criticism (improvement on highly allegorical interpretations)

D. Secularization of papacy

F. Men to note

1. John Reuchlin (1455-1522) produced a Hebrew grammar and dictionary.

2. Erasmus (1467-1536), more Catholic than Luther, published the Greek NT.

3. Philip Melancthon (1497—1560) was Luther's right-hand man and "the brains of the Reformation."

4. John Calvin (1509-1564) (See Calvin)

F. Reformation principles (Religious Age)

1. Scripture is sufficient

2. Justification by faith alone

3. Priesthood of all believers

G. Reformation leaders

1. Martin Luther (1483—1546) (See Calvin)

2. Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531) believed infants are saved without baptism, the Lord's Supper is a memorial, in contrast to transubstantiation and consubstantiation, and whatever Scriptures do not authorize is forbidden.

III. Reformation Branches

A. Anabaptists (1521) held to baptism of adults; infant baptism is invalid.

1. Abner Jones

2. Elias Smith

B. Lutheran (1530), result of attempt to reform Catholic Church

C. Church of England (1552) result of political break from Rome, retained much Catholic belief

D. Calvinistic Movements (Presbyterian and Reformed Churches)

IV. Calvinism in the Restoration Movement

A. Calvinism - Campbell

B. Methodist - James O'Kelly

C. Baptist - Elias Smith, Abner Jones

Presbyterian - Barton W. Stone

V. *When did God predestine?* (Area of Difference among Calvinists)

- A. Supralapsarianism: Decrees regarding predestination came before the fall.
- B. Infralapsarianism: Decrees regarding predestination came after the fall.
- C. Post-redemptionist: Decrees regarding predestination came after a man's redemption.

VI. *Calvin's Institutes*

- A. Book I - God as Creator
- B. Book II - God as Redeemer
- C. Book III - God as Sanctifier
- D. Book IV - Nature of the Church

VIII. *Terms used by Calvinists*

- A. Foreordination is that effective exercise of the will by which God determines beforehand what shall come to pass.
- B. Predestination is foreordination applied to the salvation of the individual.
- C. Election is the act by which God chooses and makes effectual the salvation of an individual according to His predestination.
- D. Monergist believes in grace alone
- B. Synergist believes in God and man working together
- F. Total depravity is:
 - 1. Inherent corruption of man belongs to every part of his nature.
 - 2. In the natural man there is no spiritual good to salvation.
 - 3. The natural man is opposed to God.
 - 4. The corollary of total depravity is total inability.
 - 5. Different points of view regarding depravity
 - a. Pelagianism (man has plenary ability) represented thinking of Eastern Church - said prevalence of sin was environmental.
 - b. Semi-pelagianism - Man makes a beginning by turning to God, but God must help him out.
 - c. Roman Catholic - God must first bestow the supernatural gift of faith and then man can carry on to salvation.
 - d. Reformed - Man is spiritually dead and can do no good. He is totally dependent upon the grace of God.

VIII. Why do I come to Christ for salvation?

- A. Pelagius said, “I came by myself.”
- B. “I started to come and God helped me,” said semi-Pelagians.
- C. “God started to bring me and I cooperated,” said Arminians.
- D. “God brought me,” said Calvinists.

JOHN CALVIN (1509 – 1564)

Calvin developed his system of theology in an effort to avoid the errors of Romanism, at a time when several had begun to question the underpinnings of the Catholic system. His system gave rise to the “Reformed faith,” and “Presbyterianism” is the system of church government that he developed.

Aside from a study of Calvin’s own tenets, it is also useful to examine his ideas in contrast to those of Martin Luther. The two Reformation leaders differed significantly:

1. He developed a formal system of doctrine, while Luther emphasized preaching.
2. Calvin stressed God’s sovereignty, while Luther stressed justification by faith.
3. Calvin rejected the idea of Christ’s physical presence in the Lord’s Supper in favor of His spiritual presence in the hearts of participants by faith, while Luther held to consubstantiation (the belief that the body and blood exist by the side of the elements).
4. Calvin rejected all practices that could not be proved by the Scriptures, while Luther rejected only what the Bible did not condemn.
5. Calvin believed in double election—i.e., to salvation and to damnation (reprobation), while Luther believed in the predestination of the elect but said little about election to condemnation.
6. Calvin rejected any idea of merit of the part of the elect and of foreknowledge on God’s part, while Luther believed God elected to salvation those whom He foreknew would believe.

Calvin’s ideas, however, had opposition in Holland from James Arminius (1560-1609). He sought to modify Calvinism so that God might not be considered the author of sin and man might not be thought an automaton in God’s hands. He shared Calvin’s idea that man inherits sin from Adam and is under divine wrath, but he believed man is able to initiate his salvation after God grants him the primary grace to enable him to cooperate with God. Calvin thought man is so

corrupted by the fall that he can do nothing until God moves him to act. Arminius accepted election but said that God's decree to save and to damn had its foundation in divine foreknowledge, making election conditional. Calvin viewed election as unconditional to both salvation and damnation. Arminius believed that Christ's death was sufficient for all but efficient for believers only, while Calvin limited the atonement to the elect. Arminius thought man could resist God's saving grace, but Calvin said grace is irresistible. Arminius said that God would give the saints grace so that they need not fall, but he also said the Scriptures seemed to say that that man can fall away from salvation. Arminianism had considerable influence on the High Church wing of Anglicanism, the Methodist movement of the 18th century, and the Salvation Army.

Spread of Calvinism

The Reformed faith was influential to a greater or lesser degree in these countries: Switzerland, France, Germany, Hungary, Scotland, Ireland, and Holland. The Reformation in Scotland was more radical than in England; in fact, in no other except Geneva—Calvin's home—was the influence of Calvinism so strong. The Scottish Reformation affected America indirectly through the many Scottish Presbyterians who migrated to Ireland and then to America in the early 1800's. From Geneva these doctrines spread by exiles to England, where they had some impact through the "Low Church" of the Anglicans by way of the Puritans/Congregationalists and Presbyterianism. The Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England reflected a fairly strong strain of Calvinism. Calvinism's spread to the New World through immigration was the next step.

There was a re-shaping of the basic doctrines through the influence of revivalism, beginning with Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield in this country and extending through the frontier days of early America, where Methodists were a leading influence against strict Calvinism. The passing of years, with the influence of modernism and postmodernism, has weakened the entrenched Calvinism of yesteryear. Some few groups like the Primitive Baptists (Particular Baptists in England), the Christian Reformed Church, and a few quite orthodox/conservative Presbyterian denominations still hold to all five points of Calvinism; but most Protestants who are not modernists (usually called Evangelicals) adhere to a milder, weakened form of Calvinism. Notice the changes that have developed:

Total inherited depravity.....Same, often called Corrupt or Sinful Nature

Unconditional Election..... Salvation by Faith Alone
Limited Atonement.....Dropped, for the most part
Irresistible Grace.....Regeneration by Direct Work of Spirit
Perseverance of the Saints.....Abandoned by most quasi-Calvinists

Division among the Baptists regarding Calvinism/Arminianism

Sovereignty of God controlling both election and defection(U and P): more Calvinistic groups, Regular Baptists (Particular Baptists) (Five points:TULIP)

Sovereignty of God controlling defection (P): Southern Baptists (Two points: T and P)

Sovereignty of God controlling neither (no U or P): Free Will Baptists (T only)

Division among the Presbyterians regarding the Role of Experience

Correct doctrine on divine election was sufficient light for the “Old Lights,” but the “New Lights” contended for the need to evangelize and for the value of “Christian experience” and “practical purity.” This schism began occurring in the 1740’s. Thomas Campbell, father of Alexander Campbell, was an Old Light, Anti-Burgher, Seceder Presbyterian.

Arminianism holds to the following tenets:

- Humans are naturally unable to make any effort towards salvation
- Salvation is possible by grace alone.
- Works of human effort cannot cause or contribute to salvation.
- God's election is conditional on faith in Jesus
- Jesus' atonement was for all people.
- God allows his grace to be resisted by those unwilling to believe.
- Salvation can be lost, as continued salvation is conditional upon continued faith.

(Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arminianism>)

Current Landscape

Advocates of both Arminianism and Calvinism find a home in many Protestant denominations, and sometimes both exist within the same denomination as with the Anglican Communion.

Denominations leaning in the Arminian direction include Methodists, Free Will Baptists, General Baptists, Churches of Christ, Disciples of Christ, Church of the Nazarene, Seventh-day Adventists, Pentecostals, and Charismatics. Denominations leaning in the Calvinist direction are grouped as the Reformed churches and include Particular Baptists, Reformed Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists. The majority of Southern Baptists, including Billy Graham, accept Arminianism with an exception allowing for a doctrine of eternal security. Many see Calvinism as growing in acceptance, and some well-known Southern Baptists such as Albert Mohler and Mark Dever have been trying to lead the Southern Baptist Convention to a Reformed view of faith. The majority of Lutherans hold to a third view of salvation and election that was taught by Philip Melancthon.

(Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arminianism>)

Calvinism's Weakness Shown:

- 1) God's invitation/command/instruction to saints and sinners alike: Seek, Come, Choose, Call upon, Believe, Repent, Be baptized, Obey, Evangelize, Accountability.
- 2) It is impossible to discern any difference between the sinner's inability to respond and the saint's ability in contexts where such commands or instructions are found.
- 3) Never does the Bible depict any such sinners failing to understand/obey because of inherent inability to do so.

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