

Chapter 14 Outline

Doctrine is Not the Underlying Cause of Lasting Division in the Church

Thesis—Most lasting divisions in the Church are caused by the intrusion of worldly politics

“Follow the wealth”

History is written by the victors

Is the Church a spiritual or a political entity? The visible church has tended to prefer the political characterization. Remainder of chapter is a series of examples of this.

Historical sources for chapter

Judaizers and The Legal Advantage of Being a Jew in the Roman Empire

Paul’s discussion of the Judaizers

Political dimension that is usually ignored: Jews were a *religio licita* in the Roman Empire, generally exempting Jews from persecution except in times of rebellion. If Christianity were merely a sect of Jews, still visibly identifiable as such, persecution avoided.

Gnosticism

Not a single movement, but diverse groups

Early versions of Christian Gnosticism died out without creating permanent schisms

Neoplatonism (a pre-Christian philosophical school), Egyptian/Syrian Gnosticism and Manicheanism (a separate religion)

Underlying ideas of Gnosticism, in its Christian forms

True God is infinitely separated from creation

“Emanations” between God and creation

Physical creation created by one of the emanations (an inferior deity or “demiurge”)

Disagreement over whether creator god is good or evil

Consequent disagreement over whether physical creation is good or evil

Consensus among Gnostic groups was that both creator and creation are evil (dualism)

Hence, need for asceticism to purify human spirit (good) from the influence of matter (evil)

But some groups also tended to extreme monism

To the extent Jesus was God, he did not die

Some groups taught he only appeared to be human, but was really pure spirit

Others taught he was God, during his ministry, and, either

The “God Spirit” took over his body from some earlier time in his life until just before his crucifixion, then left OR

Someone else actually died on the Cross (watch for this in discussion of Islam)
OR

He only appeared to die (forerunner of the modern “swoon” theory)

Gnostic ideas influence later developments

Gnostic concepts keep springing up from new sources

The Great Shift from Evangelizing the Poor to Evangelizing the Influential, Seeking Mass Conversions

Christianity was originally a faith of outcasts who chose Jesus, and chose to pay the price of choosing Him

Individual faith first, that brought the believer into a community

Focus in evangelism was on sin, removed by death of Christ, not sins

Sins in the life of a believer called for repentance and restoration to community;
penitence

Shift in focus, late 2nd into 3rd Centuries-focus now on evangelizing political leaders and people groups

Penitence became a formal process of restoration

Focus gradually shifted from penitence to penance

Penance, combined with increasing popularity of Christianity in many areas (resulting in unbelievers wanting to join the church for social reasons) and organization of fixed clergy and episcopacy, led gradually to shift in focus of evangelism

Concurrent drift away from direct relationship with God to relationship mediated by clergy, Mary and martyrs

“There is no salvation outside the Church”

Secular political part of shift never occurred in Christianity very far East of the Roman frontier—different political setting—at least until the much later time of the earlier Mongol rulers (result then was disaster)

Early “Successes”—Edessa, maybe (Abgar VIII?) and Armenia (301 CE)

Constantine I: Christianity as a tool of statecraft

Result: Need to tightly control doctrine and practice to maintain state security;
confessionalism; church councils and creeds using artificial theological terms rather than scriptural ones

Result: beginning of idea that the Church is a political entity; and that the whole secular community is in the Church

Theodosius I: Christianity, as defined by Imperially-sanctioned Church Councils, as the only lawful religion of the realm

Result: Many church members who have no faith at all; strict clergy-laity division now needed, though it began to develop earlier

Result: completion of the process of identification of the Church with the entire secular community and the Imperial government

Arianism

Introduction—the essentially insubstantial nature (joke intended!) of the conflict: two conflicting attempts to fit the truth of Scripture within a Greek philosophical framework totally foreign to it.

Conflict had some substance as to the original position of Arius and as to the later Anomoean Arians.

Conflict was only about philosophical language as to the Homoean majority of Arians.

Much blood was spilt over a single iota in the philosophical description of God.

Arius, Athanasius, Alexandria, Theodora and the Imperial Court in Constantinople

A succession of Emperors, East and West, of varying sympathies

The Cappadocian fathers

Councils: Nicaea, Ariminum, Aquileia, Constantinople

Continuation of Arian belief after its “defeat” by Theodosius & at the Council of Constantinople

Egypt & North Africa

Syrian countryside

Ulfilas and the Goths

Long-term impact on Southern France (as late as Napoleon, at least); area repeatedly traumatized by religious conflict; conquest by the Catholic Franks; Cathars and First Crusade; repeated clashes with attempts to centralize royal authority; central role in Calvinist Reformation; French Wars of Religion; main stronghold of Bonapartism; all related.

Antioch, Alexandria, Nestorius, and the Two First Great Schisms of the Church

The Fourth and Fifth Century Christological disputes—more attempts to fit an aspect of God’s person (the relation of human and divine in Jesus) into philosophical language

Theological relationship to the Arian-Athanasian dispute

Antiochian “literal” hermeneutic vs. Alexandrian “allegorical” hermeneutic

Role of doctrinal questions about Mary in the conflict

Underlying question: How much was Jesus like us, if at all?

Leaders of Antiochian school prior to Nestorius

Their position on the relation of human and divine natures in Christ, which later developed into dyophysitism (“Nestorian” Christianity)

Nestorius, briefly Bishop of Constantinople; deposed and exiled

Nestorius’ apparent position on the human and divine natures in Christ

Lack of most important sources until 19th Century

Luther believed Nestorius to be orthodox, based on sources available to him

Nestorius himself relatively insignificant, except as a symbol

Opposing Egyptian position—miaphysitism

More radical versions of Egyptian position—monophysitism, annihilationism

Attempted reconciliatory position: Monotheletism

Theodosius II , Pulcheria, Marcian—more politics

Councils: Ephesus I and II

The Tome of Leo to the Council of Ephesus

Definitive Council: Chalcedon

Under Emperor’s close watch

Compromise language in theological terms

Compromise at first didn’t satisfy anyone, except the all-important Emperor

Chalcedonian answer to underlying question: Jesus was not like us

Political necessity of this result

Chalcedonian compromise triumphant, by force of law/conquest in West and Byzantine Empire

Separate development of Miaphysite churches

In Egypt, involved in political rebellion there: modern Coptic church

Axum and Ethiopia

In Armenia—modern Armenian Orthodox church

In Syrian countryside—Jacobites, modern Syriac Orthodox church

Spreading East of Roman sphere in Arabia, Persia/Iran, central Asia

Separate development of Dyophysite (Nestorian) churches

Syrian countryside

Roman/Persian border kingdoms

Centers of learning at Edessa, Nisibis

Influence in Arabia

Through Roman border Kingdoms

Through Yemen, through Persian rule/influence there during some periods

Church of the East in Persia

Makes at least intermittent peace with Persian and later Moslem rulers by emphasizing differences with "Roman" Chalcedonian orthodoxy; more politics

Three periods of great spread of Church of the East through Central Asia into China

Flirting with Mongol rulers

Disaster at time of Timur I

Church of the East is still in existence

Did the churches outside the Roman sphere "fail?"

The Rise of Islam as a Failure of the Church

Thesis: failures of the Church as seen by Mohammed and his early followers led to rise of Islam

Quran, Surah 5:14—Division in Church

Southern Arabia was directly exposed to Nestorians (via Lakhmid Kingdom and Persia), Miaphysite teaching (via Byzantine Syria, Persia and Axumite Ethiopian influence in Yemen) and Byzantine version Old Catholic teaching ("Eastern Orthodox" just beginning to emerge), but all of the influence was oral

Prejudice against "backward" Arab believers

Many Arab Christian believers by 4th & 5th Centuries: Lakhmid and Ghassanid Kingdoms, Yemen.

Insistence that Arabs worship and receive Christian teaching in the teachers' languages (Syriac, Greek, Ethiopic) rather than Arabic

Apparently no attempt to translate Scriptures into Arabic

Most Arabs, except for upper classes in the Ghassanid Kingdom, were pre-literate or just beginning to develop script, or were dependent on non-Arabic

languages for literacy, and Christians generally weren't interested in helping them develop writing

Mohammed himself was "ummt," illiterate, though he encouraged his followers to learn to read

John of Damascus believed Islam was a Christian heresy, that resulted from prejudice and failure to adequately teach Arab believers (my thesis isn't original)

Distinctions between Christianity and Islam

Infinitely distant Allah vs. God with us

God has no children—Jesus or us

Discussion of Ellul's refutation of his "three pillars of conformism"

Warped echoes of aberrant Christian doctrines or practices in the Quran (and related Hadith)

Echoes of Gnostic ideas

Infinitely distant Allah

In contrast to Christian God who was made flesh

Angels and *Jinn*

God speaks only to chosen prophets

In contrast to Holy Spirit who lives within all believers

God speaks to his prophets only through angels (intermediate orders of creation)

Extreme monism

Conscious rejection of matter-spirit duality

As reaction against monasticism (Quran's corrupt Anchorites)

But note later growth of Sufi orders

Denial that Jesus died

Echoes—by conscious rejection—of prejudice against Arabs

One of the "signs" is that the Quran is in "pure" Arabic

This in contrast to prior Christian teaching

Favored place of believing Arabs in Allah's rule of the world

Echoes of historical fact of Christian division itself

The “*ummah*”—ideally the united body of believers the Church was supposed to be,

Posited by Mohammed in contrast to Christian failure

Unity of the “*ummah*,” by force, didn’t last long (Ali, Hasan, Husayn, Muawiyah, first *fitnah*)

Echoes of Arian controversy

Say not “Trinity”—Arians didn’t

Islam’s answer to whether Jesus is God the Son or only the Son of God--neither

Islam and the “Holy Spirit” (so named in Quran, but entirely different)

Echoes of Roman association between religion and Empire

Mohammed undoubtedly observed Roman use of Church as an instrument of state

Completely institutionalized this—Islam and its strongmen/government institutions are one

Echoes of Christological Controversy

Dyophysite position—Jesus’ human and divine natures separate, voluntary submission of human to divine

Islamic position—Jesus was only a human prophet, a “warner,” who submitted perfectly to Allah in practice of Islam (“solves” problem of relation of the two natures by saying only one of them existed, while keeping concept of voluntary “submission,” the meaning of the word “Islam,” from dyophysite position)

Complete reaction against both Miaphysite and Chalcedonian positions

Insistence on the distance of Allah from all people

Denials that Allah could ever be in a human

At least implicit denial that divine and human could ever be one, share a single united being

Echoes of observed wars between Christians over political rulers and doctrine

Earliest Christian communities were pacifist

Later, pre-Islamic Christian groups mostly consented to military service, also fought each other in mobs sometimes, but always had strong reservations about whether what they were doing was right

Quran institutionalized *jihad* as one of the highest *duties* to Allah

Return to Quran Surah 5:14—the “important part” of their teachings that Christians in Mohammed’s world had forgotten: John 13:35/ Rev. 2:2-4.

The Crusades

Christianity *imitating* Islam by institutionalizing holy war as a duty to God

Earlier practice coming full circle

Imitation was in response to Islamic military successes, at least in part

Deliberate misinterpretation of Luke 14:23

Crusading as an act of penance, earning salvation, directly parallel to *jihad*

Essentially political purpose common to all of the Crusades—establish princes from leading Western European houses, in submission to Rome, over areas conquered

Charlemagne’s unofficial crusades against Saxons & against the Avars, Slavs, Spanish Muslims

Coronation of Charlemagne (while Irene was Empress in Constantinople)

Official Crusades against dissenting Christians—clearest example of political purpose

Crusade against Constantinople

Success with disastrous consequences

Albigensian crusade

Albigensians /Cathars were doctrinally strange, Gnostic dualists ideologically descended from the Bogomils, but pacifist and not strongly evangelistic

Location of the crusade: Southern France, the old stronghold of the Arian Goths

Real target was Raymond VI, Count of Toulouse, who was behaving too independently of the French throne

Waldensian/Vaudois Crusade.

Origin of the Vaudois (“Poor Men of Lyons”)—again, Southern France

Vaudois were in many ways orthodox Protestants, 300 years too soon

Their worst offense was possessing and teaching a New Testament translated into their own language (Arpitan)—and not a bad translation, at that

They were pacifists, and also taught voluntary poverty—no real threat to anyone

Real target was, again, probably an overly independent local nobleman, Charles I, Duke of Savoy.

Official Crusades against “pagans” (and Orthodox slavs) in Northern Europe

The Teutonic Knights, Poland and Lithuania

Crusades in (everyone involved's) Holy Land

Reasons preached

Defend holy sites and pilgrims

Depredations were actually few and overstated

Request from Byzantine Emperor

Alexios I requested reinforcements, not an invasion force

Real political reasons

Take advantage of temporary weakness due to clash of two Muslim empires (Seljuk Turks and Fatimid Egypt)

Open a third front against Muslims (the other two were Spain and the Balkans)

Relieve an excess of armed sons of the nobility in areas of Europe

Conquer kingdoms for some of the middle-rank nobility of Europe to rule

Open the Eastern Mediterranean trade to Venetian and Genoese fleets

Plain greed

Force Roman obedience on Eastern Christians

Which of these objectives were accomplished, and at what cost?

Aspects of Islam which became a part of Western Christianity as a result of the Crusades

[Points Ellul discusses plus]

Confusion over the meaning of God's oneness & compound unities

Official Crusades of the *Reconquista*

The original conversion of the Goths from Arianism to Catholicism

The collapse of Visigothic Spain

Reasons originally preached for the Iberian crusades

Safety for pilgrims to the shrine of Santiago de Compostela

Safety for Christians remaining in Islamic-ruled areas of Spain

Underlying reasons

Build the territories of Castile and Aragon

Later also, build the County of Portugal for its dynasty

Hatred of Muslims and Jews

Revenge

Desire to plunder Muslims' wealth

Recapitulate: Politics behind all of the Crusades, negatively changed Christianity

Political Influences on the Reformation (National Church and Nation).

Kingdom as personal to King vs. Rebellious Nobles vs. Early European Nationalism

The "Great Reformers" were all "magisterial" reformers

This was necessary to survive.

Example—John Wycliffe, who was not "magisterial;"

The Fourth and Sixth "Conclusions" of the Lollards (1395) show this

experience of the Lollards, who survived because protected by certain anti-clerical Lords for political reasons, though Lollards themselves rejected politicization of the faith

became strictly underground, and small, after this noble support evaporated

Hus, Bohemia, rebellious nobility and the Emperor

Importance of Bohemia to the Emperor

Emperor had improved Prague to be his capital!

Utraquist Hussite survival in Bohemia as dominant faith until 1621

Wider influence of the *Unitas Fratrum*, even in its ultimate destruction

Luther, the *Deutscher Bauernkrieg*, and the German Princes

Self-acknowledged influence of both Hus and Wycliffe on Luther

Origin of the Lutheran reformation: sale of indulgences

Indulgences involved were sold to pay bribes that gave Luther's archbishop his office—which was a high *political* office in the Empire

To Luther, the doctrinal issue was primary; to most of the other players, it was secondary

[*Cuius regio, eius religio.*]

[Luther was from Saxony, conquered in an unofficial crusade under Charlemagne, and his movement centered there]

[interesting geographical overlap between major areas of violent Reformation conflict and areas of Nazi strength later].

Swiss City States, other than Geneva

Zurich (Zwingli, followed by Bullinger; magisterial)

Berne

Basle

All ultimately came to be dominated by Geneva

Calvin's Geneva Theocracy

Church must be whole community/state

Scriptures so perspicacious only Calvin, Consistory knows their meaning

Church must control all of life

No room for pleasure

No room for dissent

Murder of dissenters

Castellio

The French Wars of the Reformation

[curiously centered in the same geographical parts of France the Arians, Cathars and Vaudois had been—and that would also form the heartland of Bonapartism]

Backdrop is rivalry of two houses for crown of France

Bourbon (Navarre), Calvinist through most of early struggle

Guise (Lorraine) leading Catholic league

Aroused by Calvin, largely against will of monarch

Insist, like Calvin, on being whole community

Catholic opponents insist on same thing; no room for each other

First phase,

Political conversion of Henry IV/I to Catholicism

Edict of Nantes

Second phase

Defeat of Huguenots—Catholic France

Except in previously-injured Southern France, where some Protestant strength remained

The German Wars of the Reformation

First phase

Peace of Augsburg (1555), between Catholic and Lutheran *States*

Recognized freedom of princes, not believers

Opposed by many on both sides

Calvinists, and others, omitted

Lutheran Scandinavia

Second Phase

Initiated by Calvinist cities over objections of some Lutheran princes

Initial point of conflict was the succession of the Emperor Matthias

Contested by a Reformed Protestant Elector, Friedrich V of the Palatine

Led to 30 years of war, with the Swedes intervening

Peace of Westphalia (1648)

Still recognized only state denominations, now including some Calvinist principalities

Still purely political

Large net loss for Protestants

The Netherlands and Belgium, divided

Dutch Reformation started in Emden, East Friesland, and in Brussels—both now outside the Netherlands

Initial contraction in 1540s, except in Emden

Calvinist version of Reformation as patriotic expression of a revolution

War drove Protestants out of the south—now Belgium—leaving the north obstinately Protestant

Soon, however, a more tolerant version of Calvinism; most minorities tolerated

England and Scotland

Political element obvious in England—monarchs from Henry VIII to 1688

Calvinist reform in Scotland coopted by James VI

The Vulnerability of Anabaptists and other stateless Protestants

Two brief exceptions that proved the rule: Transylvania and Poland

Initial toleration that didn't last—for political reasons

American Racial Politics and the Church.

Early Established American denominations tended to accept racism, blind to slavery

Separate black/slave churches, missions, or segregated balconies

Exceptions—Quakers, Mennonites, a few other small groups of Anabaptist heritage

The Great Recession

The “Great Awakening” in two phases

First phase; spiritual, moral, but little attention to slavery/race.

Second phase divided on slavery issue

Some revivalists also abolitionists

Some oppose them

Division of Mainline Churches over Abolition, 1835-Civil War

The Holiness Movement

Arose mainly out of abolitionist branches of Methodism

Through meetings, spread into other denominations

Holiness movement tended to produce splinter sects of affected denominations

Initially, poor agreement about what was involved in being “sanctified wholly”

Division over race, particularly in Southern homeland of movement

The Pentecostal Movement

[General thesis of this section: The real purpose of the Pentecostal outpouring of 1901-about 1914 was to demonstrate the unity of the Church—similar to the purpose of comparable phenomena in Acts. However, American Pentecostal movement in general retreated from this by 1914, into segregated churches following the requirements of Southern racial politics, and converted charismatic phenomena, particularly tongues, into “evidence,” not of our unity, but of the superiority of tongues speakers (“the Baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues.”) This was never its intended purpose, and Pentecostals in most other countries did not follow the American lead in this.]

Some early forerunners—many eschewed as schismatic (and sometimes exulting in it)

Early church – First Century

Acts

Was Corinth a special case?

Montanists

Augustine's comments suggesting cessation as evidence

As suggesting also that charismatic practices were still considered a problem (an offense against ecclesiastical order)

Miracles, healing and prophecy in hagiography of the "saints" long after Augustine

Official Catholic position as expressed by Aquinas—charismata continue, but strictly within assigned orders of clergy

Pre-*Bauernkrieg* Lutherans

Some Anabaptist groups

Irvingites

Charles Parham in Topeka

Racist preacher in a radical branch of an originally abolitionist denomination (Wesleyan Methodist)

Had his students ask God a nonsense question arising out of perfectionism

God gives them what they asked for—but not for the purpose they imagined

Real purpose of the outpouring shown through early days of Azusa Street revival—show unity of Church

Contacts between William Seymour and Charles Parham in Texas

Seymour's preaching in Los Angeles

Result—a revival, and a church, open to all races and nationalities, and all came

Racial division of American Pentecostal movement by 1914

Seymour and Parham parted ways over racism

Seymour correctly argued that racism and sanctification can't coexist

American Pentecostalism then tended to adopt speaking in tongues, rather than living by the Holy Spirit, as proof of true spirituality, until quite recently

Pentecostals in other parts of the world didn't follow American example

Liberalism, Modernism, Fundamentalism, Modern American Christian Neo-Conservatism

(A good deal of this discussion is suggested by Dallas Willard, with neo-conservatism being an explicitly political development from fundamentalism, in reaction to the political content of liberal Christianity and doctrinal modernism, mixed with the

remnant of “Christian” racism and a Catholic initiative to unify the Church around pro-life and sexual morality political issues).

Conclusion