



APOLOGETICS OVER THE CENTURIES (PART 2)

The Reformation (1400-1648 A.D.)

From the tenth century onward, corruption in the Roman Catholic hierarchy increased and brought forth individual “reformers” in Peter Waldo (1140-1218), John Wycliffe (1302-1384), John Huss (1371-1415), and Giralamo Savonarola (1452-1498). In response to the Papal Schism (2-3 simultaneous popes; 1378-1417), the **Conciliar Movement** tried to shift "authority" away from the papacy to the assembled councils of the Roman Church. However, tradition had developed in such a way that only a Pope could call a council and any pope fearing censure from a council would, simply, refuse to convene one.

In the 1500’s, the continuing need for reformation led numerous priests and laymen (Luther, Zwingli, Menno Simons, Calvin) to examine the Scriptures and reject some of the teachings/practices of the Roman Catholic Church. They were quickly branded as “heretics” and forced to recant or strike out on their own. As “reformers” linked up with nationalistic German and Swiss nobles, who were tired of sending tax money to Rome, numerous reform movements began and went separate paths on the basis of the interpretations and views of the various founders. The “apologetic” of the various reformation movements usually involved concerns over important issues of Biblical information versus Roman Catholic tradition - authority in the church (Scripture, Pope, Council?), celibacy, the sacraments, etc. Europe experienced a number of wars (1520-1648) as these nationalistic reform movements had to fight for their survival and independence from Rome. The various reform movements survived, linked-up with the local government, and became denominational “state churches,” with the same type of “orthodoxy/heresy” mentality as Rome had developed. Apologetics focused on theological arguments as each reformation effort tried to define its own viewpoint as the one most true to the Bible. Soon, there were numerous dissenters in each reformation area and a growing number of skeptics who rejected the Gospel of God’s grace preached by divided believers who hated, persecuted, and fought with each other. While each denominational “state-church” consolidated its power against the others, skeptics were cultivating the intellectual soil of Europe.

The Enlightenment (1689-1789 A.D.)

Scholasticism (1000-1300) had emphasized human reason. The Renaissance (1300-1500) had emphasized “man” as worthy of attention, even “great.” Accordingly, when the reformation wars ended (ca. 1648), a movement began to take shape in Europe that saw little value in religion or revelation and emphasized humanistic rationalism. The so-called “Enlightenment” (1689-1789) or “Age of Reason” was an intellectual movement rooted in the rejection of “Christianity”

and the assertion of a different (i.e. opposite) set of presuppositions - only the natural realm exists, nature tends to inherently improve/progress, and human reason is the only means of knowledge. Centered in France, this radical secularism spread to a number of other nations until the revolution began and the French king and Queen were killed. Napoleon eventually reinstated the Catholic Church to rescue French education, but a new era was underway. Having focused on inter-denominational wrangling, Christian apologetics was caught “flat-footed” and unprepared to defend the faith against this aggressive secularism.

The Modern Era (c. 1789-1960’s)

The French Enlightenment, openly anti-Catholic and anti-religion, enthroned the “deity” of human reason and ended in a bloodbath, marking the beginning of open hostilities between the sacred and secular camps. As time went on, the presuppositions of the Enlightenment became axiomatic “facts” in the minds of many Western intellectuals and public leaders. This era saw the assumptions of “inherent progress” expressed in several areas. Darwinian evolution was a return to early Greek notions of naturalistic transformation, claiming that all life had developed “naturally” from primitive forms. German Bible critics asserted that Israel’s religious notions and the Bible had not been “revealed” by deity, but had developed in a naturalistic way. With the historical and scriptural “rug” seemingly pulled out from under Christianity, **Soren Kierkegaard** (1813-1855) turned away from “rational proof” and evidences for Biblical Theism and advocated a non-rational “leap of faith.”

Having rejected the superstitious, corrupt, and authoritarian traditionalism of medieval Catholicism, Enlightenment thinkers claimed to have brought humanity into the “Modern” era. This so-called “modern” era expressed and developed Enlightenment presuppositions, re-writing all areas of knowledge accordingly. With its outright denial of the supernatural, Enlightenment rationalism leaves people with only the philosophical foundation of naturalism and materialism (matter/nature are the extent of reality) to work from. This is the philosophical base upon which the French and Russian revolutions took place, as well as German Biblical Criticism, Darwinism, Marxism, and the secular movement in the post-1960’s United States. This is a crucial element in why modern “science” has become so closely identified with “materialism/naturalism” and why the “supernatural” is so unwelcome. Enlightenment assumptions cause many Westerners to automatically assume the non-reality and “irrationality” of religion, while assuming the “rationality” of materialistic/naturalistic “science.” Christianity has been so “demonized” that secularists can only visualize it producing inquisitions, wars, witch-burnings, and intolerance. Life becomes a matter of the great “pleasure hunt” (hedonism), inventing your own meaning for everything (existentialism), and the worship of self (self-theory). The Post-Modern (1963 onward) rejection of all “big stories” and “truth” is a pessimistic response to the failure of Modernism and its “poisoning of the well” against Biblical Christianity.

I believe that the Judeo-Christian worldview is still true and accurately describes the universe, as well as answering the basic questions of human life (origins, purpose, destiny). However, our defense must be well rounded. First, the truth of Christianity must impact our individual lives, putting our chaos into order (Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:14,15). We must begin with personal righteousness, eliminating any basis for charges of “hypocrisy.” Second, we must hold to the objective truths of Biblical revelation and the hope it offers, while pointing out the errors, inconsistencies, and harmful results of the alternatives. The intellectual challenge is

not simply “evolution vs. creation,” but to unmask and expose the errors of the whole “Enlightenment” worldview, from which the many expressions of materialism and naturalism arose. Finally, we must grapple with the false expressions of spirituality. Biblical Christianity was not designed for intellectual wimps.