

## **The Catholic and Protestant Roots of Anglicanism**

Saint Barnabas's Church, Falmouth MA

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### **Class #14: Backlash Against Modern Theology— Jesus and the Evangelicals**

1. During the nineteenth century, American witness to Jesus expands with the nation, finding expression within and beyond denominations during the buildup and aftermath of Civil War
  - a. The Founding Fathers—Washington, Jefferson, Madison—assure a strong division of church/state so that no one tradition dominates public discourse; religious expression becomes more personalized yet private in a modern, non-doctrinal sense (Deism)
  - b. Boston-based Unitarians reject Calvinism's human depravity and trinitarian doctrine for a Jesus liberated from supernatural mystery and embracing rational, moral, 'personal' inspiration—Jesus as philosopher/sage (Emerson and Channing)
  - c. Roman Catholicism, via immigration, brings unique blend of traditional piety and culture regarding Jesus, a force that keeps to itself culturally, suffers from Protestant prejudice and resists corruptions of modernity and secularism
  - d. Wesleyan pietism embraces the American frontier with its hymnody, strong communal sensibility and generally progressive notion of human spirituality
  - e. Episcopal Church differentiates from Church of England with a center of gravity in urban America and a general embrace of modernity, few Christological innovations and a dynamic tension between Evangelical and Anglo-Catholic wings
  - f. American Evangelical Christianity breaks into at least seven movements (see below) as largely populist theologies reacting against perceived formalism of other movements and against increasingly progressive theologies of moral, biblical and christological interpretation

2. Evangelical conservatives react against what they view as perilous developments in modern biblical interpretation (hermeneutics) and human anthropology, including:
- a. Enlightenment modernity embraces human reason over divine revelation
  - b. Scripture can be studied and critiqued like any other important book
  - c. Scripture contains errors and discrepancies that can be fixed or ignored
  - d. Individual must think for self (Kant), not as passive subject of doctrinaire hierarchy
  - e. Diminish or reject miracles and supernaturalism as residual superstition
  - f. Jesus as inspirational role model, not cosmic and atoning savior
  - g. Rather than being intimately involved with the creation, God left humanity on its own to be guided in its affairs by reason (Deism)
  - h. Mechanized Newtonian worldview depersonalizes God in human affairs
  - i. God too transcendent for trivial events of daily, personal life (What about Covid?)
  - j. Common human experience and goodness underneath cultural particulars
  - k. Modernity critiques supernaturalism: can only deal with that for which we can be accountable and give explanation of evidence
  - l. Modernity shifts emphasis from supernatural revelation to study of religion and individual moral/social progress
  - m. Christian doctrines restated to be relevant and conform harmoniously to spirit of age
  - n. Develop historical methods to examine/critique Bible and religion
  - o. Reject superstition and supernaturalism in favor of moral progress and subjectivity
  - p. Modernity rejects substitution theory of atonement (Christ intercedes for us on Cross and suffers required punishment due to us from God's wrath and righteous judgment of our sins, bringing about our undeserved acquittal) and replaces with Jesus who is moral exemplar of God's love, a man who acts heroically and pays the ultimate price as an expression of his innate goodness in beckoning us back toward God

In *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology*, Roger Olson identifies seven strands of evangelical theology (a term that lacks precise definition) in American life that flow from nineteenth century:

- a. Evangelical—as contrasted with moralistic or legalistic—religion that proclaims good news that human persons can be saved by receiving free grace won for them by Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection (cf. general incarnation)

- b. Evangelical as synonymous with Protestant and linked to seminal work of Luther, Zwingli and Calvin that focuses on salvation by grace through faith alone
- c. Evangelical as found in Reformation Church of England and denoting wing of Anglican theology who de-emphasize liturgy per se for scriptural emphasis on personal faith in Jesus Christ as source of salvation
- d. Evangelical and Pietism who reject dead orthodoxy for personal conversion to Jesus Christ via repentance, faith and holiness of life
- e. Evangelical as conservative reaction against liberal Protestantism and reaffirming 'fundamentals of faith' like supernatural worldview, transcendence of God, reality of Trinity, deity of Jesus, virgin birth, bodily resurrection of Jesus and authority of Bible
- f. Evangelical as post-fundamentalist and softening militant and separatism of 1920s and 1930s yet quite sympathetic to revivalism (e.g., Billy Graham)
- g. Evangelical as popular rather than scholarly or historical

General priorities of evangelical worldview:

- a. Supernatural worldview that embraces direct and unmediated revelation from God
- b. Sole authority of Bible for all matters of faith and moral action: orthodoxy and tradition
- c. Jesus Christ as unique Lord, God, and cosmic source of salvation
- d. Fallen state of humanity and salvation via Jesus' unique atoning sacrifice
- e. Personal repentance and conversion for full salvation
- f. Personal growth in holiness and discipleship
- g. Urgency of gospel evangelism and social transformation one soul at a time
- h. Apocalyptic return of Jesus Christ to judge world and establish final reign of God
- i. Define self against rising secular humanism and historical-critical approach to Bible
- j. Toward end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, great debates about inerrancy of Scripture
- k. Bible as supreme norm of truth for Christian belief and practice

Fundamentalism arguably reaches its intellectual zenith at Princeton Seminary under leadership of Charles Hodge (1797-1878) and John Gresham Machen (1881-1937)

- a. Embody strong doctrinal orthodoxy to balance rising populism and folk religion
- b. Hodge trains > 2000 students during 56-year tenure and becomes leading social conservative and proslavery advocate via fundamental biblical argument
- c. Confront dangerous Enlightenment thinking by defining rigorous 'science' of theology: "Bible contains the truths which the theologian has to collect, authenticate, arrange, and exhibit in their internal relation to each other"
- d. Like scientist, faithful can observe divine revelation regarding Jesus
- e. Bible not set of miscellaneous texts but, rather, supernatural process of 'inspiration' that extends from God through human authors that are very words of God and therefore infallible (reject historical-critical methods of modernity)
- f. God controls human beings (including biblical authors) without robbing them of their personality
- g. Any scriptural discrepancies are insufficient to detract from supernatural origin and authority in manner that trumps any mystical, intuitive or natural interpretation
- h. Machen serves as lightning rod against liberal interpretation of Scripture and spawns rapid increase of independent Bible colleges with great emphasis on personal regeneration through Christ, sinless perfectionism and victorious Christian living
- i. Bipolar evangelism balancing personal/inward piety with objective doctrinal orthodoxy