

Church History, Lesson 28

(This lesson is based on The Story of Christianity by Justo Gonzalez.)

Modern Challenges to Christianity:

Slavery – In the United States, differences over slavery among Christians were silenced because of the need for a united front against Britain during the Revolutionary War.

- After independence, opposition to slavery was about equal in both the North and the South. Eventually, however, as slavery increasingly divided the nation, denominations like the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians were divided as well. Some southern preachers actually defended slavery on the grounds that it lifted African blacks out of the darkness of paganism.
- After the Civil War, during the period of Reconstruction in the South, Southern Christians distrusted anything from the North. This led to an anti-intellectual bias because the universities and seminaries were in the North.
- In addition, the southern Christians' mistrust of Northern policy and resentment over the loss of the war quickly turned to prejudice against blacks. Blacks and whites had worshiped together in mixed churches, however, blacks were encouraged to start their own segregated churches after the war. This led to the formation of several black denominations like the National Baptist Convention, the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church.
- Some of these black congregations did important missionary work in Africa.

Urbanization / Industrialization – The mass movement of American workers to the urban centers for factory jobs caused conditions that could not be completely met by local congregations and traditional denominations.

- "Para-church" organizations like the YMCA and YWCA reached out to urban youth with the Gospel.
- In addition, Sunday Schools became a way for churches to reach out to masses of urban youth. In 1872 several large denominations began agreeing on the texts for Sunday School lessons allowing greater cross denominational cooperation.
- Another response to urbanization was pioneered by D.L. Moody. He started as a Sunday School organizer and YMCA promoter. While he was in England working for the YMCA he was invited to preach. That began a preaching career that included the U.S. and England. He took the more rural method of "revival meetings" and applied them to the urban situation. He was also careful to avoid some of the theological and methodological mistakes of Charles G. Finney.
- A final response to the urban challenge that should be noted is the dissatisfaction of some Methodists with their denomination. Some, like William Booth, felt that Methodists has left behind some of Wesley's teaching on sanctification and had ceased to reach out to the needy. This led to the founding of the Salvation Army, and also to "holiness churches" that emphasized the possibility of entire sanctification.

This "holiness movement" led to the beginning of the "Church of the Nazarene" in 1908 and eventually to the Pentecostal movement, including the founding of the Assemblies of God in 1914.

"Liberalism" – Many new ideas were circulating, especially in Europe. Darwin's Origin of Species contradicted the creation story of Genesis. And the historical-critical method called into question the authorship and accuracy of almost every book in the Bible. In addition, the "quest for the historical" Jesus challenged the orthodox understanding of Jesus' deity.

- Protestant liberalism was an attempt to incorporate these new ideas into the framework of Christianity.
- Fundamentalism was the conservative reaction to these new ideas and the attempt to incorporate them into Christianity. At a 1895 meeting in Niagara Falls, NY these 5 "fundamentals" were listed:
 - the inerrancy of Scripture
 - the divinity of Jesus
 - the virgin birth
 - substitutionary atonement by Jesus death on the cross
 - Jesus' physical resurrection and impending literal return

The point of these "fundamentals" was to state that none of these could be denied without falling into liberalism and essentially denying the faith.

The modern missionary movement:

William Carey in India:

- William Carey was born in England in 1761.
- Carey became a teacher and a cobbler. He was fascinated by the stories of new lands being discovered by Captain Cook. Carey took the unconventional position that God wanted Christians to spread the gospel to these lands.
- It is said that he created a world map out of shoe leather and hung it over his cobbler's bench and prayed over the nations as he worked.
- He eventually started the Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel, but couldn't find anyone willing to go as a missionary to foreign lands. Eventually Carey decided that he must go.
- In 1793 the Careys landed in Calcutta, India, but because of the opposition of the British East India Company they had to settle in nearby Serampore. They experienced regular hardships and opposition. One letter to his supporters in England included news that they were beset with obstacles all around, and therefore there was nothing to do but just carry on with the project!
- By the end of his life, Carey had translated all or part of the Bible into 35 languages.
- He also spent significant time opposing the practice of burning widows on their deceased husband's funeral pyres.

The Haystack Prayer Meeting and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions:

- In the U.S. group of students from Williams College who called themselves the Society of the Brethren regularly met outdoors to pray for missions. On one occasion, they found themselves outside during a thunderstorm and ended up having their prayer meeting under a nearby haystack. During this time they committed themselves to serving as foreign missionaries.
- This group eventually started the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and sent Adoniram Judson to serve in India. However, as we will see, the Judsons ended up in Burma.

Adoniram Judson, Burma:

- Adoniram Judson was the son of a Congregational minister, and a brilliant student. He graduated from college as valedictorian of his class at age 19. His friend, Jacob Eames, was a Deist and influenced Judson to doubt his childhood faith. At age 20, when Judson was spiritually adrift, he ended up in a roadside inn. His sleep was interrupted by the groans of a sick man in the room next door. The next morning he learned that the man had died in the night; he also learned the identity of the deceased -- Jacob Eames!
- This so rattled Judson that he returned home to do some serious soul searching. His father along with some other ministers were starting a seminary and they encouraged Judson to attend. He was a special case because he couldn't honestly profess faith, but after a few months he clearly and publicly committed himself to God.
- Judson was originally sent to India, but had to settle in Burma. He was originally sent by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, but when he came to Baptist convictions regarding baptism there was an outcry among the Congregationalists who sent him. The Baptists had to form a mission society to support him!
- Judson married Nancy Hasseltine in February of 1812 and 13 days later they left for the mission field. The Judsons' life in Burma was filled with trials. They lost a baby on the voyage to Burma. Translation work was very slow and tedious. (Burmese had no punctuation, capital letters, or spaces between words.) Sickness regularly took them away from the work.
- They finally had some encouraging results when they built a "zayat" or pagoda like structure for just sitting and visiting with the Burmese. By 1820 there were 10 converts.
- However, in 1824 war broke out between England and Burma. The Burmese distrusted all foreigners and Adoniram was imprisoned in a death camp. At night, he would be hung by his ankles until only his head and shoulders touched the ground. Nancy passed away, and their little baby would have died except, the guards allowed Adoniram out of the prison twice a day to go out to beg for nursing mothers to suckle the baby.
- Judson experienced an emotional breakdown, but eventually returned to the work and remarried. He focused on revising his Bible translation and as Judson began to do itinerant ministry, crowds thronged to hear him, and many were converted.
- In 1845, his second wife died on a voyage home. Judson rallied because the public wanted to hear of his work since he had been gone for over 30 years. But the churches were disappointed because all he would do was preach the Gospel! He remarried a final time, to Emily Chubbock, who was in her 20's and half his age. Some people considered this a scandal but she mothered his children and gave up her strength and health to help him in the work. He died in 1850. She died 3 years later.