

The Christian Terminology

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Abstract

During the High and Late Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church was attacked by a number of theologians who introduced new teachings aiming chiefly at modifying its services. The religious movements- that the Reformers launched- were given different names including Catharism, Calvinism, Protestantism, and Puritanism; but each movement helped to extend the preceding one. For instance, Puritanism in England is considered only as a continuation of the preceding religious changes, and not a new movement. The Protestant groups agreed on one point which was the fact that the Roman Catholic Church was corrupt and Christ was its head not the Pope. In addition, they agreed about the importance of the Scriptures in people's life. To sum up, hostility towards the Roman Catholic Church resulted in the birth of different sects, the most conspicuous of which was Puritanism. In fact, it is of some interest to note that the Puritan ideologies were not similar. A group of Puritans- called Separatists, Non-Conformists, and Independents- believed that religious purity required renouncing the Church of England, whereas another group of Puritans believed in the possibility of the reform, and had no intention of breaking with the Anglican Church.

The Christian terminology consists of a number of concepts including the Waldenses, Calvinism, Lollardy, Protestantism, Puritanism, Separatism, and a number of other concepts which all of them refer to a religious movement, that was at the root of eleventh century Catharism. In fact, the term Protestant can be applied to all of them since they protested against the Roman Catholic Church aiming primarily at making religious reforms.

The historian Kenneth C. Old suggests that the Cathars and Waldenses were the first Protestants who appeared in France in the eleventh and twelfth centuries successively. Both of the movements survived in Europe, mainly in France, Italy, and Germany. The Waldenses were followers of the French merchant Peter Waldo, and the Cathars followed the French preachers Peter of Bruys and Henry of Lausanne who derived their crusade's name from the Greek word *katharos*, meaning pure. The preachers rejected papal supremacy and declared that the Bible alone was the only authority. Among the religious practices which they rejected were purgatory, a condition of punishment for the dead in order to achieve holiness needed to enter heaven; and indulgence, release granted by the Church from punishment. As a result of the protest, the Catholic Church declared the two groups heretical sects. The latter took refuge in Germany and Switzerland merging gradually with other sects, and became Calvinistic during the Reformation. (1)

The fifteenth century saw the emergence of the Hussite's movement, named after its leader John Huss, a religious thinker and master at Charles University in Prague, Bohemia. According to the movement, Christ but not the Pope should be the head of the church. In addition, Huss asked for the availability of the Bible in the common language of people, who should be educated to read and understand it. As a result, the Roman Catholic Church considered these teachings as heretical since they questioned the Church's authority but contributed to the Bible's translation in a period when it was supposed to be published in Latin. Therefore, the Church burned the

movement's leader after he had been excommunicated in 1411.

The Hussite's movement was to proceed with the Calvinists, followers of the sixteenth century French theologian and church reformer John Calvin, who also shared the Cathars and Waldenses' belief in the Bible as the unique canon for the religious life, but differed in believing in the doctrine of predestination, under which a number of Christians were predestined by God for heaven or hell. In fact, Calvin's teachings were summarized in the Five Points of Calvinism, also known as TULIP: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints. Calvin's impact was first noticed in the Swiss Reformation under the leadership of the Swiss theologian Ulrich Zwingli. There, the Protestants were called Anabaptists, a name derived from the Greek language meaning to baptize again those who had been previously baptized. In fact, the Anabaptists believed in adult baptism in the sense that infant baptism was not convincing. They also supported the separation of church and state, which meant that government should not interfere in the religious institutions. (2)

During that time in history, the term Protestant started to be used for the first time on April 19th, 1529, when a meeting of the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire at Speyer, Germany annulled a grant of toleration to followers of the German theologian and religious reformer Martin Luther who asked for reforms at the level of the Catholic Church. The Protestants were not satisfied with the practices within the Catholic Church, which were mainly: simony- the possibility of people to get into a position in

the church after they had contributed with money; nepotism- the right of the popes and bishops who had not their own children to choose instead their nephews for higher positions in the church; and indulgences- release from punishment by God. The Lutherans also voted to alter a decision of the Diet, which had already been promulgated in 1526, that was to allow the German princes of the Hapsburg Empire to decide on the religion of their territories. Force of circumstance compelled twenty Lutheran delegates to announce a formal protestation, which stated that "in matters which concern God's honor and salvation and the eternal life of our souls, everyone must stand and give account before God for himself." Therefore, in this manner the term Protestant was born.(3)

Similar views had prevailed in England regarding religious reforms at the level of the Church. There, the Protestant belief started to develop in the fourteenth century with the first ideas introduced by John Wycliffe, an English reformer, and Desiderius Erasmus, a Dutch humanist. Those reformers were called the Lollards,(4) who summarized their demands in a document sent to Parliament entitled 'The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards', which claimed that the Catholic Church had been corrupted by inferior situation, including prayers for the dead and chantries, an excess of church fixtures which should be replaced with the help of needy people. Icons were also considered by the Lollards as dangerous since a number of people worshiped them instead of God, which would lead to idolatry. Furthermore, the Lollards thought that confession was unnecessary since the priest did not have any power to forgive sins, and opposed the

practice of clerical celibacy and denounced war and violence.

At first, the movement was protected by anti-clerical nobles including John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. For instance, in 1377 John Wycliffe was freed with the assistance of Gaunt after he had been summoned to Lambeth Palace to answer for his Protestant writings. The University of Oxford also allowed the leader to keep his position at the university in spite of his views on the grounds of academic freedom. Yet, Lollardy faced persecution after the Peasant's Revolt in 1381. (5) In fact, John Ball, one of the peasants' leaders, preached about Lollardy. Resistance against the movement went on even in the next century. Among those opposing it was King Henry IV (1399- 1413) who passed 'De Heretico Comburendo' in 1401, which banned the translation of the Bible and permitted the burning of heretics. The first execution of a layman in England for the crime of heresy was John Badby who refused to renounce his Lollard views, and one of the last Lollards to be persecuted was Thomas Harding in 1532, a date that showed the end of the movement.(6)

Worth noting is the fact that the similarities that existed between the Lollards and later English Protestant groups, including the Puritans- a name given in the sixteenth century to the Protestants within the Church of England who wanted to purify it by eliminating every aspect of Catholic influence- suggest a historical continuation of the Lollard ideas through the Reformation. These similarities can be summarized in the fact that both the movements rejected the authority of the Catholic Church,

and insisted on the right to translate the Bible into the language of people.

Yet, at that time the term Protestant was not applied to describe the reformers in England. It is a fact that the number of acts enacted by Parliament against the reformers- including the Treason Act of 1534 by King Henry VIII (1509- 1547) and An Act for the Punishment of Heresies of 1553 by Queen Mary I (1553- 1558)- did not mention the word Protestant, instead the acts used the terms heretic, tyrant, and infidel. It was only during Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603) that the term was used with the enactment of the Protestant Act for the Uniformity of Common Prayer and Service in the Church and Administration of the Sacraments. The act stated that English worship should follow the Book of Common Prayer of 1552, (7) and that Catholics could keep their worship without any punishment. Other forms of worship not mentioned in the new Prayer Book were forbidden.

The Elizabethan period also saw the birth of the term Puritan. More precisely, the Protestants were strongly criticized by Archbishop Parker, an English prelate, around 1564 who described them as Puritans or Non-Conformists. However, the historian Kenneth C. Old states that the English reformers used the term Puritan for themselves because they thought it was obligatory to purify the Established Church of England from a number of Roman Catholic practices.(8)

Another form of church government which emerged during that time was Presbyterianism. The latter insisted on the authority of both God and the Bible, and on the practice of two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, it opposed church interference in

ecclesiastic affairs; but advocated a church composed of representative assemblies called presbyteries, in opposition to church government by bishops. These attempts to reshape the Anglican Church did not please the authorities. Thus, in the 1580's John Whitgift- the Archbishop of Canterbury- started his assault on Presbyterianism. He insisted on using the Prayer Book in worship, and following the Thirty- Nine Articles. Both of the documents were a summary of all services and prayers followed in the Established Church of England. The Archbishop also stated that all ministers would be fined and imprisoned in case of not conforming to the law.

In fact, the Presbyterian failure to reform the Anglican Church encouraged a number of Puritans to separate and establish their own churches. Successfully, the English theologian Robert Browne formed his first congregation in 1580 in Norwich, England. The Separatists were fined, imprisoned and even hanged. As a result, one year later they decided to leave England for Holland. The Brownists' choice to settle there could be chiefly justified by the fact that the established Church in Holland was one of the most tolerant provinces in the Netherlands during that period. For that reason, a number of Protestants who were persecuted elsewhere in Europe fled to the province. Economically, Holland was famous for its textile factories, which could offer opportunities for employment. (9)

The Brownists became known for the English authorities as Separatists, Non-Conformists, Independents, Congregationalists, and they were the Pilgrims- which means "wanderers" or "travellers." Although the group

found religious peace in Holland, they were not pleased with their life there. They did not want to wait until their children would be influenced by foreign culture. They finally decided in the early seventeenth century to sail to North America to become the first settlers of New England. The historian Kenneth C. Old states that not all the Puritans in England at that time were Separatists. There was another group of Non-Separatists who disagreed with the Anglican Church but attempted to reform it from within. Interestingly, their emigration started after the death of the Calvinist king James I (1603- 1625) and the succession of Charles I (1625- 1649) who was a Roman Catholic. So, there was a feeling of threat experienced by the Puritans. Clearly, this is an obvious difference between the two groups. (10)

On the basis of the similarities that existed between a number of religious movements in Western Europe in the period ranging from the eleventh to the seventeenth century, it is concluded that Puritanism originated from the early centuries. In fact, all of the movements protested against the Roman Catholic Church believing that it was going wrong and needed to be reformed and this was to be the goal of the Puritan reform. Indeed, the religious movement in Europe was given different names starting with Catharism to end with Puritanism.

References:

1. The Reformation is a religious and political movement that started in the sixteenth century in Western Europe to reform the Catholic Church. The Hutchinson Illustrated Encyclopedia of British History, Britain: Helicon Publishing Limited, p. 278.
2. Kenneth C. Old, Understanding of Christianity, U.S.A: The Macmillan Company, 1995, pp. 140- 145.
3. Robin W. Winks, Robert Lee Wolff, eds., A History of Civilization. VI Prehistory to 1715, U.S.A: Prentice Hall, 1988, p. 313.
4. The origin of the term "Lollard" is taken from the Middle Dutch word "lollaerd," meaning a babbler. Its first use in English was in 1382. The Hutchinson Illustrated Encyclopedia of British History, op.cit, p. 213.
5. The rising of the English peasantry in June 1381, the result of economic, social, and political disillusionment. Ibid., pp. 255- 56.
6. BEKADDOURI Fouzia, A Magister Paper, "Establishment and Evolution of Puritans in New England. (1620- 1740)", Oran: Faculty of Letters, Languages and Arts, 2004- 2005, pp. 8, 13, 15.
7. The full name of the English Book of Common Prayer is The Book of Common Prayer and Administration of the Sacraments and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church according to the use of the Church of England together with the Psalter or Psalms of David pointed as they are to be sung or said in churches and the form and manner of making, ordaining, and consecrating of bishops, priests, and deacons. Kenneth C. Old, op. cit., p. 201.
8. Ibid., p. 147.
9. BEKADDOURI Fouzia, op. cit., p.16-17, 21.
10. Kenneth C. Old, op. cit., p. 150-51.

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