CHAPTER IV

CHALLENGES OF EMOTIONAL AND INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENTS FOR CHRISTIANITY

Though movements on emotion and intellect played a major role in contributing to the growth of Christianity, certain beliefs and practices were always remained as challenge for biblical Christianity. Though Montanists were ready to die for their faith, their attitude was “Holier than thou.” Further, the essence of monastic spirituality is flight from the world. Monasticism kept the ordinary people out of reach. Moreover, they were in their own world. Mysticism as an emotional movement emphasized three stages of deification as salvation; purgation, illumination and union with God. However, it neglected reason. Therefore, many unbiblical teachings were taught in the name of new experience. Pietists believed that orthodoxy must be accompanied by orthopraxis, i.e. right-living. In renewing the existing church, sadly, Pietism became another church within the church. It used Bible only for devotional purposes. It created a theology of Experience. It also neglected the effect of corporate sin. Pentecostalism is indeed attached to Christian “fundamentals” and to conservative understanding of scriptures. Moreover, Pentecostals are also guilty of many exaggerations, oversimplifications and personal quirks that do not come from the authentic Pentecostal spirit. Being an emotional movement, it neglects reason for some of their beliefs and practices.

Under the ruling ideas of sin and salvation, Gnosticism took its distinctive character from, the ideas of Greek philosophy with the myths of Oriental religions. As an intellectual movement, Gnosticism went too far in interpreting the Christian message. Scholasticism was an intellectual movement which attempted a
methodological and philosophical demonstration of Christian theology as inherently rational and consistent within the cultural context of medieval Europe. However, it proved to be overly intellectual, dry and irrelevant to spiritual life. Moreover, there was no mission during the Reformation period as the Reformers were busy with doctrinal disputes. Sadly, Reformation orthodoxy missed the pendant in the necklace.

Liberation theologians start with a “view from below” that is, the sufferings of the oppressed. This contextual theology sees Christ’s salvation as in one moment of history, a paradigmatic rather than an inimitable event. It emphasizes humanity at the centre, and ethnocentric oriented. It also gives excessive emphasis on the poor and has inadequate ecclesiology.

This chapter portrays the challenges of the emotional and intellectual movements by bringing out its weaknesses
4.1. WEAKNESSES OF THE EMOTIONAL MOVEMENTS

4.1.1. Montanism – Holier Than Thou Attitude

Montanism as an emotional movement revived the early Church from their lukewarm spirituality by their new revelation. It laid claim to supernatural inspiration by the Holy Spirit as the source of its prophecy, and it pointed to the moral decline of the Church as the main reason for having lost this power of the Spirit. They had some admirable inclinations. First, their stance was a growing reaction against the looseness, worldliness, and increasing rationalism in the church as a whole. Second, the Montanists refused to accept the establishment of a select priesthood which had been developing in the church up to that time. They made no distinctions among the believers, at least in the matter of prophesying, and were very much inclined towards a more universal priesthood. Third, their daily living focused on the Lord’s second coming and the appearing on earth of the New Jerusalem. Finally, the Montanists were ready to die for their faith; martyrdom was extolled, and it appears that a number of them did give their lives during times of trial. However, the Montanists had a “Holier than thou” attitude, and certain teachings became a challenge in the early church. A few of its weaknesses are mentioned below:

Wrong Claim

Montanists believed that the Holy Spirit or Paraclete was giving them new revelation, especially regarding Christian morality. They adopted the name “New

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312 A Jesuit scholar, Walter J. Burghardt, writes, “I can find no persuasive evidence that primitive Montanism was guilty of heresy.” David F. Wright, the Senior Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History at Edinburgh University and the first editor of Themelios, states that the church’s rejection of Montanism was "damaging and regrettable"  
Prophecy for their movement. This expressed their deepest principle that the Paraclete was still uttering direct revelation to His people, or, in other words, prophecy was a criterion of authentic Christianity. Some followed Montanus when they first heard his prophecies. Others, being irritated as at one who was inspired by a devil and a spirit of error and was troubling the multitudes, rebuked him and forbade him to speak. These people remembered the command of the Lord and His warning to maintain an alert guard against the coming of false prophets (Matt. 7:15).

**Judgmental Attitude**

The Montanists judged bishops as disqualified if they did not meet a “pure” standard of Christian life. Indeed, the early Church really needed a fresh inspiration of the Holy Spirit and a fresh exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But the Montanists who claimed to be filled by the Holy Spirit were often arrogant, disobedient, and difficult to guide and control. This attitude misled many sincere people and made the movement undesirable to many in the early Church.

**Evangelical Freedom to Jewish Legalism**

Montanism became a stumbling block to the early church due to some unusual teachings of its own. Montanism shunned with horror all the enjoyments of life and held even art to be incompatible with Christian soberness and humility. It forbade women all ornamental clothing, and required virgins to be veiled. Moreover, it courted the blood-baptism of martyrdom and condemned concealment or flight in

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314 According to Angus Stewart, recently, one feminist scholar has argued that Priscilla was the most important prophet and that "Montanus was in fact the ‘advocate’ [i.e., supporter, helper] of Prisca and Maximilla.” Trevett, who is a milder feminist, argues that we ought not assume that either Montanus or Priscilla was the leader. Trevett proposes a more "egalitarian" scheme, though she concedes that Montanus was the first to prophesy. Other key leaders in the history of Montanism include Theodotus, who, like Montanus, was both a prophet and a trustee (epitropos; Ecclesiastical History 5.16.14; 5.3.4).

315 Angus Stewart, “Was the Church right to condemn Montanism?” in Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in http://www.cprf.co.uk/articles/montanism.htm; (accessed on Dec. 12, 2012).
persecution as a denial of Christ. Montanism promoted multiple fasts and other ascetic exercises and carried them to the extreme as the best preparation for the millennium. It prohibited second marriage as adultery, for laity as well as clergy and was inclined to regard even a single marriage as a mere concession on the part of God to the sensuous infirmity of man. Moreover, it taught the impossibility of a second repentance, and refused to restore the lapsed to the fellowship of the church. According to Philip Schaff, “It certainly went to the opposite extreme, and fell from evangelical freedom into Jewish legalism; while the Catholic Church in rejecting the new laws and burdens defended the cause of freedom.”

**Imbalance between the Spirit and the Written Word**

God has given His redeemed both the Spirit and the Word for a proper and healthy Christian life. Both are required to effectively receive divine counsel. If the Word is not properly cared for, there will be serious deviations from the truth. If the Spirit is neglected, there will be a lack of vitality, even deadness. All alleged spiritual revelation and prophecy should be based on and agree with the Scriptures, God’s written revelation. This balance, however, was not kept by Montanus and his followers, and extra-Biblical and contra-Biblical teachings crept into their midst.

**Emphasis on Outward Practices**

Montanists emphasized the outward conformance contrary to the New Testament’s focus on the inner life of the believers. They emphasized fasts, forbade second marriages, and demanded a strict lifestyle of severe self denial. These were all beyond the New Testament parameters. Paul Onica says that such a legalistic imposition of such practices must have led people of weak disposition to failure,

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defeat, discouragement, and even desperation. The Apostle Paul never endorsed outward demands and restrictions; rather, he encouraged his readers to have a normal, daily experience of Christ for their growth in life, with prophecy being an outflow of such a life and having the building up of the Body as the ultimate goal.

**Spiritual Pride**

The Montanus prided himself on his purity of doctrine. However, it was always with the help of the women prophets and their new “revelation.” Later, Montanus and his immediate followers began to teach, as one of their fundamental doctrines, that Divine Revelation had not reached its full growth through Christ and His Apostles. They further said that Divine Revelation was only in its period of youth; it required the further revelation given through the Montanistic movement to attain its full maturity of manhood. Donald Gee observes that “Once the anchor of acceptance of the Old and New Testaments as completing the Divine Revelation was thrown away, it is little wonder that the vessel quickly drifted onto the rocks of hopeless error and extravagance.” The pride of the Montanists led to the fall in the later stage.

**Summary**

Jim Smith underlines five reasons for the objection of Montanism.

1. “Abnormal ecstasy.” Montanus prophesied in a frenzy, without engaging the rational mind, “contrary to the manner which belongs to the tradition and succession of the church from the beginning.”
2. No controls. When respected bishops and church leaders sought to practice discernment with Montanist prophets, the prophets refused to submit.
3. Worldliness. Some questioned the Montanist financial dealings. Others worried about their lifestyle: “Does a prophet dye his hair, paint his eyelids, love adornment, play at gaming tables and dice, lend money at interest?”
4. Extra-scriptural revelation. Many were concerned that people would hold the oracles of the New Prophecy in higher esteem than the Scriptures.

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5. False prophecies. Maximilla declared that there would be wars and tumults and, after her death, no more prophets but “The End.” Yet, some thirteen years after her death, there was peace. 318

A few orthodox teachers, though they didn’t join the movement, refused to condemn it. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon, was concerned that those attacking the Montanists would drive the authentic gift of prophecy from the church. 319 Montanism resembles today’s Pentecostal movement to a certain extent. Joseph Miller warned the Christians by saying, “The enthusiasts of every age follow the pattern of Montanus in folly, pride, and uncharitableness. Nothing happens here but what is foretold in Scripture and in truth, delusions of this sort so generously accompany the real work of God, that wherever that appears, there very seldom fail to appear also.” 320

4.1.2. Monasticism – In their Own World, Out of the Common Man’s Reach

The monks were the spiritual nobility of the church, and represented a higher type of virtue characterized by entire separation from the world and consecration to the kingdom of God. Philip Schaff observes that the patristic ideal of piety was passed over into the Middle Ages; it is neither the scriptural nor the modern ideal, but one formed in striking contrast with preceding and surrounding heathen corruption.\(^{321}\) Claude J. Peifer reveals that the essence of monastic spirituality was flight from the world. The monks took refuge in the desert to seek an existence which transcended created good. They did not play a direct role in the construction of a Christian civilization in this world, but looked forward with intense desire to the kingdom of God which was to come.\(^{322}\)

Monasticism kept the ordinary people out of reach. Moreover, they were in their own world. Christ laid on no heavy burdens as a new and painful law; and still less did He see salvation in asceticism as such. He Himself did not live as an ascetic; but He set before a perfect simplicity and purity of thought, and a detachment of heart which, in abnegation and tribulation, in the possession and use of earthly goods, should remain unalterably the same. The simplest and hardest command in the Law is the love of God and neighbour. He set it at the head of all, as opposed to all ceremonial sanctity and to all over-refined morality. He bade each of human to take

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his own cross, that is, the sufferings which God appoints, and follow Him.  

A few challenges of Monasticism are listed below.

**The Tendency to Withdraw from the World**

The monks’ tendency was to flee from the world. Therefore, too many of the best men and women of the empire were drained off into the monasteries, and their abilities were lost to the world which was so badly in need of such leaders. Philip Schaff observes,

Monasticism withdrew from society many useful forces; diffused an indifference for the family life, the civil and military service of the state, and all public practical operations; turned the channels of religion from the world into the desert, and so hastened the decline of Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and the whole Roman empire.  

Sadly, monks gave much emphasis to personal holiness rather than to social holiness. They did not speak out for justice in the society. Further, the Benedictine conception of the Christian life was essentially unnatural. To enter a monastery was to separate oneself from the world, to abandon the ordinary relationships of social life, to shun marriage and all that the Christian home signifies. And supporting the whole endeavor was an erroneous view of man. The soul, said the monk, is chained to the flesh as a prisoner to a corpse. Bruce L. Shelly says that it is not the Biblical view of human life, and it created a fundamental flaw in Monasticism.  

Schaff also adds that “the monkish sanctity was a flight from the world rather than a victory over the world, an abstinence from marriage instead of a sanctification of marriage, chastity outside rather than inside the order of nature, a complete

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324 Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries*, p.168.


326 Bruce L. Shelly, *Church History in Plain Language*, p.123.
suppression of the sensual passion in the place of its purification and control.” But it had a powerful influence over the barbaric races and was one of the chief converting and civilizing agencies. The Eastern monks lost themselves in idle contemplation and ascetic extravagances, which the Western climate made impossible; the Western monks were, upon the whole, more sober, practical, and useful.\textsuperscript{327}

\textbf{Spiritual Pride}

It was considered that those who live in monasteries were better people. Too often monasticism merely pandered to spiritual pride as monks became proud of ascetic acts performed to benefit their own souls. F. Hrangkhuma believes that monasticism produced spiritual pride among the monks. It advocated a double standard of Christian living, one to be attained by the elite, the other for the ordinary, less dedicated people.\textsuperscript{328} As the inmates of monasteries were usually able people, and their discipline severe, many monasteries became very rich. Wealth usually pulled down discipline, and lack of discipline often gave way to corruption of all kinds. Because of community thrift and ownership, Cairns concludes, the monasteries became wealthy, and then laziness and avarice and gluttony also crept in.\textsuperscript{329}

\textbf{Extra Merit; Doing more than God requires}

Certain requirements were beyond God’s requirements in the Scripture. It was out of the common people’s reach. The monks’ aim was to attain holiness by punishing their physical bodies. Peifer rightly said that the monk does not seek the values of the city of man; he burns with desire for the city that is above, the heavenly Jerusalem. Fasting was highly emphasized and practiced among the monks. Schaff notes,

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{328} Hrangkhuma, \textit{An Introduction to Church History}, p.95.
\textsuperscript{329} Cairns, \textit{Christianity Through the Centuries}, p.168.
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For the simple, divine way of salvation in the gospel, it substituted an arbitrary, eccentric, ostentatious, and pretentious sanctity. It darkened the all-sufficient merits of Christ by the glitter of the over-meritorious works of man. It measured virtue by the quantity of outward exercises instead of the quality of the inward disposition, and disseminated self-righteousness and an anxious, legal, and mechanical religion.

Jovian said that the value of the monastic practice of fasting should be seen according to the Biblical basis. While analysing the monastic movement, he wrote,

All things are created to serve the use of men. And just as man, a rational animal, and, as it were, the administrator, and owner of the universe, is subject to God and reveres his maker, thus all living things have been created either as food for men, or to clothe them, or to cultivate the earth, or to transport its produce, or to carry man himself.

Jovian also argued the same from the creation of all things by God for man to the legitimacy of their use. The affirmation of the inherent goodness of creation went against the whole tendency of monasticism to asceticism, to the rejection of the world, and to an eschatologically-inspired life.

A False view of the Flesh

Monks believed that the flesh is evil and that something was wrong in the flesh itself. Sexuality and marriage were seen as sin. They said that if you want to be holy you should not marry. The flesh was seen as physical. They misunderstood Paul’s concept of the flesh. Even this concept was not only growing among monks but also in the church. The Roman Catholic Church commands priest not to marry.

Further, Monasticism praised the value of virginity. Monks claimed that virginity was of greater spiritual value than marriage. However Jovinian stresses the cleansing effect of baptism and questions the comparison between marriage and virginity. According to him, virgins, widows and married women, once they have

been baptized in Christ, enjoy the same merit so long as they do not differ in other works.\textsuperscript{332}

The celibate life kept these able men and women from marriage and the rearing of able children. This led to one standard of morality for the monks (celibacy) and another for the ordinary individual.\textsuperscript{333} Hrangkhuma says that it kept the most able men and women from rearing able children to become leaders of the future.\textsuperscript{334} Celibacy is purely of human institution. Therefore, the marriage of the clerics is permissible. In this regard, I Tim. 4:3 gives the Biblical perspective. Here, Paul criticizes those who forbade marriage.

**False Doctrine of Works**

Monasteries put more emphasis on man’s works than on the grace of God. Luther’s great positive assertion of his rediscovery was justification by faith alone. All of man’s deeds, however, difficult or heroic they might be, were utterly incapable of “justifying” him. He still remained a sinner. The same is true even of works which man might perform after his “justification” but without faith, that is of the works whereby he might think to present himself as “just” in the sight of God.\textsuperscript{335}

**Monastic Movement became Independent of the Church**

Monasteries were not part of the local church. They were not controlled by bishops. They would not submit to local leadership. They thought that they were outside the authority and control of the church. There was no way to discipline them. The monastic movement definitely was a mixture of good and evil.

\textsuperscript{332} Ibid., pp.124-125.
\textsuperscript{333} Cairns, Christianity Through the Centuries, p.168.
\textsuperscript{334} Hrangkhuma, An Introduction to Church History, p.95.
Sadly, monasticism did not immediately find a comfortable place within the social structure. According to Joseph T. Lienhard, “For all the monks’ protests about withdrawal from the world, they were a highly visible part of society. If pagans rejected Christianity, they rejected monasticism all the more violently.” This shows the unpleasant worldview of pagans about monasticism.

**Superstitions**

Monasticism favoured the idolatrous veneration of Mary and of the Saints, the worship of images and relics, and all sorts of superstitious and pious fraud. Moreover, it also circulated a mass of visions and miracles, which, if true, far surpassed the miracles of Christ and the apostles and defied all the laws of nature and reason. The Nicene age was full of the most absurd monk’s fables, and is in this respect not a whit behind the darkest of the Middle Ages.\(^{336}\)

Finally, the monastic ideal of chastity was not Biblical and not good except for those who were especially called to it. God needed men and women to carry His work while living within the world or society. Francois Biot right said that Christ was the only way to salvation. Everything apart from Jesus Christ, everything to the right or to the left of this living way, was to be rejected.\(^{337}\) Christianity is a way or religion for all and not for oneself alone to attain personal holiness while being way from the world. This reminds of Luther’s concept on the priesthood of all believers. A Christian was bound to keep the commandments of God and perform “the works of faith,” but this was not out of obligation, nor necessary for salvation. They were done in a state of freedom, viewing these works as the simple fruits of faith.


4.1.3. Mysticism – Neglecting Reason, Everyone has a Say

From the beginning of Christianity there was an attempt on the part of many to experience the presence of God in one’s life in a direct and personal way. The mystics’ goal was to have a personal union between God and man’s soul. Mysticism as an emotional movement emphasized three stages of deification as salvation; purgation, illumination and union with God. However, it neglected reason. Therefore, many unbiblical teachings were taught in the name of new experience. It also became a mockery of their opponents who said, “mysticism – everyone has a say.” According to Winfried Corduan, mystical traditions were so unique that they had nothing in common and did not hold either.338 Mysticism tended to elevate group worship and gave importance to individuals. Some say that it was a reaction against intellectualism (Scholasticism). A few of its challenges are listed below.

Tendency to fall into Pantheism339

Pantheism sees God in everything. Mysticism began to fail in distinguishing the Creator and creation. So God was seen as lesser than He is. This appeared to have been the case with Amalrich of Bena, a master of theology at Paris around the year 1200. Three sentences of his indicated his standpoint: 1) “God is all things.” – 2) Everyone is bound to believe that he is a member of Christ, nor can one be saved who does not believe the birth and suffering of Christ and the other articles of faith. 3) To those who have entered into the state of love, no sin is imputed.”340 The teachings of this sect, judging from the representations made, were characterized by an

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339 Pantheism means "God is The All" and "All is God". It is the idea that natural law, existence, and/or the universe (the sum total of all that is, was, and shall be) is represented or personified in the theological principle of ‘God’.
undisguised pantheism and an ultra spiritualism. In the place of the Catholic doctrine of the Trinity and the incarnation, they taught a succession of divine manifestations and incarnations, God being revealed as Father through His incarnation in Abraham, as Son through His incarnation in Mary, as Holy Spirit through His incarnation in themselves. As having the spirit, they thought of themselves as above the need of external rites and obligation of written laws. Spiritual birth was regarded as a substitute for baptism, and spiritual resurrection as a substitute for the raising of the body from the dead.  

**Sacraments and Good works were Unnecessary**

Beguines, a mystic movement was founded by communities of women in the Netherlands in the twelfth century. They were loosely organized, without vows, permitted to own private property and even to leave their community to get married. Carl A. Volz notes that they fell under suspicion of heresy, which in their case was identified as striving for perfection through union with God; that such deification made all religious acts (sacraments and good works) unnecessary; and that they claimed exemption from Church authority.

**Tendency not to involve in the World and it’s Social Problems**

Mysticism leads one to be completely detached from the affairs of this world. It did not seek to transform society or culture. For example, the mysticism of love dominated female mysticism, which first began to flower in the middle of the twelfth century. Thousands of mostly wealthy married women, who were dissatisfied with their subordinate status in society and the ecclesiastical order of charismas, joined the Cistercians in order to change their “carnal marriage” into a “spiritual marriage” with

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Christ. In the thirteenth century, the more freely organized but orthodox movement of the Beguines began to attract many women from all social ranks, primarily in the new urban centres of Western Europe. Contemplation and union with Christ was the typical form of female love mysticism, which ranged from loving compassion with Christ’s suffering to explicit accounts of erotic encounters with the Savior. Female mysticism reached an intellectual climax in the writings of the Spanish nun St. Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582). Her symbol of the “interior castle” and its various rooms signified the different stages of perfection the soul must pass to achieve final perfection and union with God in the “innermost chamber.”

Withdraw from Material things

John Meister Eckart was a Dominican mystic. He spoke of the soul as being a spark of the divine, as one’s ground of being. According to Eckart, “One must withdraw from material things and ideas in order to enter the soul and thus be restored by God. By so doing, one actually became one with God.” He was accused of pantheism by the Arch Bishop of Cologne and his twenty eight propositions were condemned by Pope John XXII. This showed the influence of pagan thought into the Christian mystic.

John Tauler, another Dominican said that all things in which one cannot find God will seem as a wound, and the truly spiritual soul requires complete detachment from personal desire. He called himself the “secret emperor” of a “secret kingdom” (i.e. the soul). Tauler was critical of the “walled church” (i.e. the institutional church)

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344 Voltz, The Medieval Church, p.176.
and encouraged his hearers rather to find solace through inward migrations into the soul.

**Making a mystical experience central**

The story of mysticism is incomplete apart from the element of the experience in which the link to the absolute is realized. Apart from that, the integrity of the individual is questioned. Instead of bringing experience under Scripture, the mystics interpreted the Scripture to suit their experience. Therefore, many able people left the church. Many of their ideals and writings were based on what they felt and what they experienced. Mystical experience is subjective. The unmediated link to the absolute is limited to the individual’s life world and interpretive framework. No mystics ever explained their experience from outside of their personal background. As soon as one starts to talk about objectivity in the mystical experience, the issue gets extremely cloudy because mystics themselves were not happy with the term ‘objective.’ Therefore, one can see a wide variety of interpretations across the traditions.

In John Tauler and Heinrich Suso, experimental and practical aspects of mysticism predominated. They emphasized religion as a matter of experience and the rule of conduct. Tauler was addicted to quietistic views, therefore, he spoke of being “drowned in the Fatherhood of God,” of “melting in the fire of His love,” and of being “intoxicated with God.”

Eckart, a mystic theologian was condemned for two of his heretical articles. According to him, “As soon as God was, He created the world. The world is eternal.

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346 Ibid., p70.
347 Ibid., p.71.
External acts are not in a proper sense of good and divine. The fruit of external acts does not make good, but internal acts which the Father works in us. God loves the soul, not external acts."\(^{350}\) The two added articles charged Eckart with holding that there was something in the soul which was uncreated and uncreatable, and that God was neither good nor better nor best, so that God could be called good no more than than white could be called black.

Corduan believes, “If the New Testament allows for mystical experience at all, then it can only be at the fringe of Christian experience. We are nowhere taught to seek such an experience, let alone a method to go about procuring one.”\(^{351}\)

**Minimizing Sin**

Many mystical systems began with the premise that the human person stood already in a relationship to God that only needed to be realized. But biblical Christianity recognizes human fallenness and the need for reconciliation on the basis of the work of Christ.\(^{352}\)

**Minimizing Grace**

Conversely, some Christian forms of mysticism recognized the problem of sin and then lay down rules for personal self-purgation. This approach was also unbiblical. According to the New Testament, salvation is the free gift of God, received by faith alone.\(^{353}\)

**Neglecting Intellectualism**

Rudolph Agricola, a German humanist spent much time in Italy and then travelled in the Netherlands and Northern Germany. He wrote on education and

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\(^{352}\) Ibid., p.114.

\(^{353}\) Ibid., pp.114-115.
opposing the intellectualism of Scholasticism.\textsuperscript{354} Opponents of the movement said that no one could see God, and that this talk of the eyes of the body was absurd, and that people were being misled.\textsuperscript{355}

Socrates also had urged men not to rest hopes upon the Delphian oracle, but to listen to the voice in their own bosoms. The mystics, in seeking to hear the voice of God speaking in their own hearts, ran the peril of magnifying individualism to the disparagement of what was common to all and of mistaking states of the overwrought imagination for revelations from God.\textsuperscript{356}

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4.1.4. Pietism and Methodism – Church within a Church

The central motifs of the Pietists were reforming the church. Believing the first Reformation had bogged down in dogmatics, polemics, and institutional rigidity, the Pietists offered concrete proposals for Bible study, conventicles, and increased lay participation. This focus on practical Christianity may be indicative that Pietism fostered no theology of its own; however, the emphasis on practice, exegesis, and mystical appropriation of the grace of God often assumed and represented certain theological presuppositions.\(^ {357}\) Pietists believed that orthodoxy must be accompanied by orthopraxis, i.e. right-living. The conviction that faith must become active in love and the focus on sanctification and godliness meant that Pietism was permeated at its core with an ethical flavor. In renewing the existing church, sadly, Pietism became another church within the church. The same things were true in the history of Methodism, as it became another denomination in the later stage of the movement.

**Church within the Church**

When a movement, which originally exists to revive the existing churches, reaches its peak it may become another group or another denomination. The Pietistic Movement was never properly organized. Moreover, the Pietists formed ‘ecclesiolae in ecclesia,’ groups within a Church, which they believed would serve as spiritual leaven for the larger group by promoting a living Christianity. But these small groups of Pietists inside the Church were misunderstood and misinterpreted, and there was much cause for misunderstanding.

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Bible only for Devotional purposes

Unlike the Reformers, the Bible was emphasised only for devotional purposes. The Pietists often shared with the sects the primitivist conviction of faithfulness to the New Testament church. The Bible was to be read devotionally and appropriated in terms of life styles.\textsuperscript{358} Doctrinal discussion and disputes were far away from the Pietists.

Theology of Experience

What offended Pietism’s opponents perhaps more than anything else was its emphasis on the emotional or experience based religious life. Pietists insisted on the need for an authentic and vitally significant experience of God on the part of individual Christians. Perter C. Erb observes, “The religious life as a life of love for God and man, which is marked by social sensitivity and ethical concern; utter confidence, with respect to the issues of both life and death, in the experientially verifiable authenticity of God’s revelation in Christ, as found in the biblical witness…”\textsuperscript{359} Further, Martin Schmidt and others have maintained that the heart of Pietist theology is its focus on regeneration.

Pietism emphasized the revival of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, which usually accompanies any theology of experience in the Biblical context.\textsuperscript{360} Pietism also stressed pastoral training that would place less emphasis on scholastic polemical theology and more on the development of a sensitised ministry concerned with practical devotional.

Among Pietism’s North American descendants, the emphasis on subjective individual experience, initially directed against an arid scholastic concern with “pure”

\textsuperscript{358} Brown, Understanding Pietism, p.27.  
\textsuperscript{360} Brown, Understanding Pietism, pp.27-28.
doctrine, and soon forced a peculiar semantic shift within the language of piety. By this shift, “knowledge” of God was reduced to an “emotional experience” undergone at conversion and in devotion, and the emphasis on faith soon turned the gift into near-Pelagian work. Pietism’s radical division of head and heart would, in time, support anti-intellectualism.\textsuperscript{361}

Pietism’s concern with the priesthood of all believers tended in popularist democratic circles to merge with anti-intellectualism and support only the most simplistic theological positions.\textsuperscript{362}

**Difference between the Saved and Unsaved**

The Pietists themselves often made much of the contrast between the converted and the unconverted among the members of the local churches, and in many instances, even scorned them. This caused much friction in local churches. The Pietists unwisely stressed knowing the exact date and time of conversion. In 1687, Francke himself, experienced sudden conversion, preceded by a great spiritual struggle and a conviction of sin. His conversion was so vivid that he could state accurately its time and place. Anyone who was unable to state exactly the time and the place had his conversion called in question. If a pastor did not adhere to these Pietist views, they doubted his conversion, and at times nourished conscious opposition between those they believed were unconverted clergy and converted lay people.

**Another Pharisaism**

The Pietist’s code of conduct bordered on Pharisaism. Their ethical exhortations were full of dos and don’ts, and stern judgment was passed on whoever

\textsuperscript{361} Erb ed. *Pietists: Selected Writings*, p.25.
\textsuperscript{362} *Ibid.*
breached their ethical norm. This attitude produced a legalistic, pharisaical Christianity. Their unbalanced emphasis on the second coming of the Lord and the Millennial reign of Christ, and their reliance on visions and dreams at times led them to subjectivism. Their disregard for dogma often led them to serious departures from Biblical interpretations on vital questions.

**Definition of Salvation**

The Pietistic definition of salvation had to mean “redemption from self, from one’s own person.” Barth stressed that redemption was not merely for a few but for all, not just the private fulfillment of an individual longing for salvation, rather redemption was about the salvation of the world. He also objected to their “unpleasant habit of smelling and sniffing at their fellow human beings to find out if they were converted,” to their unnatural rules about what we call “Christian” and “non-Christian,” which they used to harass people, and thus to their pious separation from the world, and their individual blessedness which was indifferent to earthly distress. The Pietists somehow did not pay serious attention to the social dimensions of the Gospel. They missed the concern towards poverty and oppression.

**Neglection of Corporate Sin**

Though the Pietists and other evangelicals were active in proclaiming against the individual sin, they missed the opportunity to fight against corporate sins like slavery. It was William Wilberforce, who fought against the slavery trade in 1807.

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4.1.5. Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements – Always ‘Looking Above’

While the Liberation movement was looking always below (emphasising on human struggle), the Pentecostal movement is looking always above (emphasising heaven and eternal life). They are standing on tiptoe, expecting something to happen from heaven.

It is true that Pentecostal spirituality brings a confidence of joy, a lively awareness of the presence of God, a sense of contact with God, and a deep conviction of His omnipotence. At the same time, it is facing enormous challenges due to its unbalanced teachings. David Martin notes that Pentecostalism is indeed attached to Christian “fundamentals” and to conservative understanding of the Scriptures. Moreover, Pentecostals are also guilty of many exaggerations, oversimplifications, and personal quirks that do not come from the authentic Pentecostal spirit. Being an emotional movement, Pentecostals neglect reason for some of their beliefs and practices. A few of its challenges are listed below.

**Baptism in the Holy Spirit**

At the heart of the Pentecostal experience is baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostals within the Protestant churches have two sorts of Christians, those who have been baptized in the Spirit and those who have not. The former are qualified by speaking with tongues. According to Richard Quebedeaux, baptism in the spirit does not occur in the New Testament. The noun “baptism” is never used in that way.

J.E. Stiles describes the tragedies that arise from the Pentecostal doctrine:

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366 A few times the verb “baptize” is employed in this connection with the Greek preposition *en*, translates “with” (Matt 3:11, Mark 1:8, Luke 3:16, Acts 1:5, 11:16). These verses refer to the same saying ascribed to John the Baptist that the coming Messiah would “baptize” with the Holy Spirit.” The
1. The most upright Christians never receive the baptism of the Spirit, because they know themselves well enough to be aware that they can never regard themselves as purified.
2. Those who receive the baptism of the Spirit automatically rise to a higher class of Christians, whereas
3. Those who have not received the baptism of the Spirit seem to be Christians of an inferior quality.
4. This often results in the arrogance of those who have received the baptism of the Spirit.
5. Therefore, it must now be said of the Pentecostal preachers that those baptized with the Spirit who later have an excessive opinion of themselves have not really been baptized by the Spirit of God, even if they have already spoken in tongues: they have only been anointed by the Spirit, and this will be followed later by a true filling with the Holy Spirit.
6. A recognition of this will discourage the best Pentecostal preachers from ever preaching about the baptism of the Spirit.
7. Baptism of the Spirit wrongly becomes a goal, instead of means. 368

This shows that the Pentecostals exalt the secondary benefits of the Spirit-baptism to a primary level and do not take seriously enough the fact that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ.

Like the early Wesleyans, Pentecostals saw revival as comprising two elements; conversion and sanctification. They sought to be baptised in the Spirit because they had a yearning and a longing for holiness. They wanted to be a blessing more than they wanted to get a blessing. Today the phrase ‘catch the fire’ has been a popular one. But John the Baptist spoke of fire as a cleansing, purifying agent (Matthew 3:11, 12). In the New Testament, over half of the references to fire are to fires of judgment.

Emotion and Experience centred Theology

Pentecostals try to study “what happened to us” rather than what they have arrived at by the study of Scripture. This kind of development has produced an anti-intellectualism that revolts against education, rejects intellectual analysis of religious

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experience, and rejects a Biblical examination and analysis of religious experience. R. Hollis Gause notes that in traditional Pentecostalism, this has led to emotional excesses in worship, erroneous doctrinal affirmations, and false personal judgements. Among charismatics, the experience of speaking in tongues is used to confirm the rightness of all of the personal conditions, beliefs, and practices which prevailed at the time. The “imitation of Jesus” motif helps them to judge all things by the question, “what would Jesus do in this situation?” The subjective answer to this is taken as the answer of the Holy Spirit, as understood emotionally and experientially. Sadly this is a shallow form of emotional pragmatism that is passed off as the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

An unbiblical emphasis on experience has been reflected in phenomena associated with the ‘Toronto Blessing’ and ‘the River.’ Barry Chant narrates, a popular visiting preacher told the crowds he addressed in Sydney to ‘leave their brains at the door’ and just enjoy what was happening. Another warned people not to question, because ‘a critical spirit will damn you to hell.’ In a recent conference, a prophecy was given telling pastors to burn all their old sermon notes and get ‘fresh fire.’ Moreover, there’s a strong focus on encouraging people to achieve personal victory through responding to altar calls, having hands laid on them, or being ‘slain in the Spirit.’ Chant says that there is nothing in the New Testament to encourage Christian living by laying on of hands. Christian victory is attained by walking in the Spirit, praying in the Spirit, putting off the old, putting on the new, putting to death the flesh etc. The epistle of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians describes this.

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*Ibid., p.115.*
Chant asks, “Are we training people in an ultimately destructive way of life and to live by experience instead of faith?” The Pentecostal movement has been strong on fads: the rapture, fasting, deliverance, dancing, falling, groaning, seed faith, prosperity gospel, positive confession, power of praise, scripture songs, praise and worship, spiritual warfare, laughing, crying, etc. Most of these can be valid, but the Pentecostal movement has given them first place (one at a time). But nothing should have first place except the Gospel! Rod Lensch writes, ‘Without a doubt, heresy creeps into a revival movement when subjective experience is elevated above objective truth.’

**Unhealthy Abandonment of Sound Doctrine**

Sound doctrine has often been abandoned in the face of expediency, especially in the realm of evangelism. If something will bring a crowd or result in conversions, the Pentecostal movement has often ignored doctrinal and theological problems to achieve its evangelistic goals.

Sound doctrine and effective evangelism should go together. It is sad that evangelism (a noble profession) has become associated with extravagance, exaggeration and falsehood. Jesus said, ‘I am the truth.’ The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and Christians ought to be people of truth. Expediency should never dictate one’s message.

**Understanding of Spiritual Gifts**

The purpose of the spiritual gifts is to edify others. Edward D. O’Connor stresses that the spiritual gifts are not given for oneself, but for the service of

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others. Sadly, most of the Pentecostals emphasise on receiving gifts for their personal edification. On the theoretical level, the classical doctrine, as formulated by St. Thomas Aquinas, defines the charisms as graces given primarily and directly, not to sanctify the recipient himself, but in order to help him bring others to union with God. The gifts give power to a person’s apostolic efforts. Even though they are from Holy Spirit, they can be misused if they are not directed by love and wisdom

**Excessive Importance to Charisms**

Many Pentecostals attach excessive importance to the charisms. O’Connor believes that whether they admit it or not, Pentecostals look upon the charisms as the highest gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are more interested in prophecy, healing, and tongues than they are in brotherly love and heartfelt prayer. They judge the quality of a prayer meeting by the amount of charismatic activity that has gone on in it, rather than by the intensity of prayer.  

**Prosperity Gospel**

The other challenge is the fastest growing movement within Pentecostalism called “The Prosperity Gospel or Health and Wealth Churches.” Sadly, the Pentecostal movement has picked up the secularist, materialist values of society. The consumer mentality is evident in music, entertainment, ‘manifestations,’ charismatic leadership, comfort and so on. What works for them is what is right. Sound doctrine is, for some people, but for others, it is no longer an important issue. In poor countries, the churches emphasize the miraculous power of God to heal incurable diseases and to bring wealth to those who faithfully support the ministry of the church. These churches are influenced by tele-evangelists like Benny Hinn. For

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outsiders, these churches often appear to trade in magical thinking and psychological manipulation. Moreover, the founding pastors of these churches tend to personally enjoy the Prosperity Gospel, sometimes at the expense of their churches’ impoverished members.\(^{374}\)

Suffering is the most authentic token of Christian life. To be an authentic Christian is to pass under the shadow of the cross, not to avoid that shadow. The prosperity gospel or the theology of glory knows nothing of the theology of the cross. The sign of a true and living faith in God is conformity of the believer to the cross of Jesus Christ.\(^{375}\)

**Unhealthy Leadership Style**

Some Pentecostal leaders are elevating themselves above criticism or question, and people who raise issues may be told that they are being rebellious. Lensch warns, “Charismatics… tend to gravitate to places where the pastor is a dynamic person and a dynamic preacher… The trouble here is that dynamic people can ‘wow’ the troops and be put on a pedestal like little popes…” Chant adds, “I am not saying that all dynamic pastors are prone to error but they must not become a substitute for the Lord and his Word.”\(^{376}\)

**Theological Identity**

Most of the Pentecostals are not willing to support advanced theological training as strongly as they do advanced training in other areas. They tend to place their religious commitments and experiences in an unanalyzed vacuum unaffected by other intellectual developments. R. Hollis Gause reveals, “Traditional Pentecostals

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\(^{376}\) Chant, “The Strengths & Weaknesses of the Pentecostal Movement”
want a slicked-up evangelistic and hortatory professionalism but not an analytical and systematic theology. The charismatics want an experience that does not interfere with doctrinal and traditional commitments already made.”

**Ungodly and Unbiblical Focus on Raising Money**

In one church in Australia, a visiting American preacher was given over $100,000 for three meetings. Chant asks, “What did Jesus get for the Sermon on the Mount?” Other itinerant ministers are insisting on raising their own offerings and are doing very well at it. At a recent conference, delegates were told, in effect, ‘Godliness = gain.’ Chant wonders what the Apostle Paul would say to that? (1 Timothy 6:6-10). These are very worrying trends and signal trouble for the movement while looking at the unbiblical focus on raising money.

**Attitude towards Culture and other Religions**

Pentecostals’ attitude toward their cultures is antagonistic or at least negative. It is because culture and religion in Asia are integrally linked. Also, Pentecostalism in Asia still maintains a strong Western mindset. This has made Asian Pentecostals stay away from any constructive engagement with Asian religions and their traditional culture. According to W. Ma, “a Burmese student expressed his surprise at participating in ecumenical worship where a Burmese native musical instrument was used. To him, it was simply unthinkable because that particular musical instrument has not only a cultural, but also a Buddhist, connotation.” It will take the next generation to be able to view cultural elements from a neutral perspective.

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The attitude of the Pentecostals toward other religions easily can be compared to that of a “crusade”. They are zealous to “convert the heathen”. Their engagement with people of other religions is to persuade them of Christianity as the “only way to the truth”. They are highly charged to “win the lost” before the imminent return of Christ. Sadly, Western Pentecostal missionaries, coming from the “Christian West”, brought their cultural bias to Asia. Ma warns that this crusade attitude is obviously not capable to prepare Asian Pentecostals to build a mutual understanding with other religions so that all could live peacefully as citizens of one and same community.379

Finally, Pentecostals have faced a critical challenge to nurture this spiritually dynamic Christianity. In this process, in some areas, the movement has achieved remarkable success: in church growth, in responding to real life-felt- needs, and in engaging in the spiritual world. It also has showed powerful ecumenical potential in its theology and history. And yet, the movement generally has failed in living out its theological potential and has neglected reason. Therefore, the pendulum has begun to move towards the intellect. The end of this century will plant a seed for reforming this emotional movement which will ultimately lead towards an intellectual movement.

4.2. WEAKNESSES OF THE INTELLECTUAL MOVEMENTS

4.2.1. Gnosticism – Moved out of Reality

Under the ruling ideas of sin and salvation, Gnosticism took its distinctive character from the ideas of Greek philosophy with the myths of Oriental religions. It implied an affectation of intellectual superiority. The key note of the Gnostic movement was superior knowledge, rather than penitence, faith and love. The Gnostics were right in recognizing that Christianity could no longer be confined within the limits of Jewish thought. Christianity was not to be a sect within the national religion of the Jews; it was to be a religion with a world appeal. John Foster judges that the Gnostics’ mistake was like that of a man who, in re-shaping his house to give it more room and make it up-to-date, destroyed its foundations. As an intellectual movement, Gnosticism went too far in interpreting the Christian message. Christianity is a historic religion, founded upon certain events which really happened. Sadly, the Gnostics ignored many of the facts recorded in the New Testament, and imagined a different Christ, with a different gospel, about a different salvation.380 The most characteristic feature of Gnosticism was belief in a subordinate agent, the Demiurge, by whom the visible creation had taken place. A few of the weakness of Gnosticism are listed below.

Understanding of God

The Gnostics set out from the Platonic axiom that God is good, and nothing but good. They had a fundamental belief that the Creator of the world was not God, the Supreme Being, but either a subordinate agent, or an inferior being. He may be evil, or He may not be unfriendly. He was the Demiurge, and so not the God who sent

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a Redeemer into the world. And the Redeemer, so sent, was not a real incarnation of the Divine, but One whom they viewed after a Docetic fashion. He was One, that is, no longer unique, whose humanity was no longer real.

**Understanding of the World**

Gnostics wondered how the world, in which so much evil prevailed, could come from a good Creator. They therefore sought a theodicy, and turned their attention to the origin of evil. They set an ethical dualism between spirit and body-setting, in fact, nature and spirit in absolute opposition to each other. They bridged the gulf between the transcendent Deity and the world of matter by a vast succession of spiritual powers or Aeons. Like the Platonists and Greek schools generally, they thought not of man as making his own evil. Evil must come from matter, and must be the work of that being who created a material world.\(^{381}\)

**Salvation by Knowledge**

According to Gnostics, salvation consists of enlightenment or knowledge rather than faith. Redemption lost both its universality and its moral character in their hands. Their theology assumed for its *gnosis* a higher worth than the *pistis* of the Church. Their pretensions on behalf of their *gnosis* were like those of Philo, who claimed to have a secret lore that came by way of oral tradition. They presented Christ to have given an esoteric teaching to His apostles, different from the teachings of the Church to the people. Yet their position should perhaps be looked upon as supranaturalist, rather than rationalistic.\(^{382}\) However, John 3:16 says that salvation is an act of faith. The Gnostics moved out of this authentic reality.

\(^{381}\) James Lindsay, “Gnosticism as a Philosophy of Religion,” *Princeton Theological Review*, vol. 1. No. 4. 1903., p.617.

\(^{382}\) Ibid., p.618.
Rejection of Revelation

The Gnostics believed in revelation in a general sense. Hellenic Gnosticism agreed to the Divine authority of the Old Testament, but said that it contained a hidden philosophy, which accounted for the liberation of spirit from the bondage of nature. The allegorizing method was resorted to, so that the contents of the Old Testament were interpreted as symbols of this hidden truth. For dreams of a Messianic kingdom they substituted a mystical philosophy with a whole series of vague personified spiritual abstractions. Hellenic Gnosticism applied the same method to interpret the New Testament. It prided itself on the inner light which was necessary to acquire such Gnosis or illumination which gave the true mystical interpretation of the sacred record. The Gnostics’ problem was to explain the relation of the God of pure monotheism to the world and to man.  

Rejection of the Humanity of Jesus

Many Gnostics favoured a view of Jesus as a divine messenger who only appeared to be human. Orthodox and Catholic Christians insisted that Jesus was in fact human.

Rejection of the Hebrew Bible

The Gnostic Marcion rejected the Hebrew Bible and accepted a new scripture made up of Luke’s gospel and Paul’s letters. In response other Christians insisted that the Hebrew Bible--the “Old Testament”--was still valid; they also began to form their own “New Testament.”

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Soul or Matter

Many Gnostics believed that Jesus descended from above, on the model of Wisdom in the late Judaic apocalypse 1 Enoch 42:1–2, to provide this secret knowledge and the passwords that allowed the freed spirit to pass through the planetary spheres and return to the Godhead. In some versions Jesus became the syzygy, or partner, of Sophia. Gnostics believed that they were the true “pneumatics” (those aware of their inner *pneuma*, or spirit), while ordinary Christians were “psychics” (aware of their *psyche*, or soul), and all others were “hylics” (ignorantly stuck in *hyle*, or matter). The return of the spirit to the *Pleroma* was celebrated ritually as a marriage of the soul with its heavenly counterpart. Some taught that the true resurrection was not of the body but has already occurred, when Jesus revealed the truth to the enlightened one, a point stressed by the Gnostic writer Valentinus in the *Treatise on the Soul.*

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4.2.2. Scholasticism – Not for the Common Man

Scholasticism was an intellectual movement which attempted a methodological and philosophical demonstration of Christian theology as inherently rational and consistent within the cultural context of medieval Europe. However, it proved to be overly intellectual, dry and irrelevant to spiritual life. The schoolmen argued and explained at such a higher level that it was not understood by common man. Even Martin Luther, who loved to refer to medieval scholasticism as “that great whore” that seduces Christian theology into absurd speculation, was influenced by it and had to reckon with it.  

Excessive Emphasis on Reason

Scholasticism placed excessive emphasis upon the role of human reason. Luther occasionally suggested a parallel between the scholastic emphasis on reason and the confidence in human soteriological resources associated with the *via moderna*.

The schoolmen and their work clearly proved their excessive emphasis on human reason in doing theology. Anselm of Canterbury investigated problems surrounding God from a reasonable viewpoint. He taught that faith must lead to the right use of reason: “I believe, in order that I may understand.” It was Anselm who first put forward the “ontological argument” for the existence of God. This was an attempt to prove God’s existence by reason alone, starting with the idea of the most perfect being … God is “that than which no greater can be conceived.” He developed the famous principle “faith seeking to know.”

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Peter Abelard sought to show various ways in which contradictory texts could be synthesized. He became involved in the disputed question concerning whether “universals” were really things or merely names. Gilbert de la Porree continued to develop various views in a scholastic manner. Hugh of St. Victor sought to give Scholasticism more of a mystical flare; he was criticized by many because of his lack of reasonableness. He was deeply indebted to Augustine for his views.

Bernard of Clairvaux developed a psychological view in Scholasticism that, although wedded to a form of mysticism, sought to be more reasonable than the mystical. Peter Lombard developed a series of “sentences” for the seminarians who were studying for the priesthood. It is this form of Scholasticism that caused many persons to discredit it as an uncreative experience.389 Sadly, the Schoolmen’s work purely did less for common men in order to be edified in their spirituality.

**Neglected Human Experiences**

Scholasticism failed to do justice to human experience. Its excessively rational character failed to engage with the experiential aspects of the Christian faith. Luther’s existential approach to faith contrasted sharply with the more detached and analytic approach of Scholasticism.390

**Majoring in the Minor**

Endless questions were ridiculed during the scholastic period. Albertus Magnus asked whether it was harder for God to create the universe than to create man and whether the understandings of angels were brighter in the morning or in the

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evening. “Who sinned most, Adam or Eve?” was a favorite question with Anselm, Hugo de St. Victor, and others.\(^3\)

Bonaventura debated whether several angles can be in one place at the same time, whether one angel can be in several places at the same time, and whether God loved the human race more than He loved Christ.\(^4\) Anselm, in his work on the Trinity, asked whether God could have taken on the female sex and why the Holy Spirit did not become incarnate.\(^5\) Robert Pullen asked whether man in the resurrection will receive back the rib he lost in Eden, and whether a man will recover all the clippings of his finger nails.\(^6\)

Philip Schaff says that such endless questions were ridiculed as puerile and frivolous, though, as has already been said, they grew out of the desire to be exhaustive. At last and justly, they brought Scholasticism into disrepute. While it was losing itself in the clouds and mists of things transcendental, it neglected the earth at its feet.\(^7\) One should not forget the advice of Paul. I Timothy 1: 4-5 says, “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned”

**New Vocabulary unknown to Classical Latin**

In their effort to express the minutest distinctions of thought, the Schoolmen invented a new vocabulary unknown to the classical Latin, including such words as *ens, absolutum identitas, quidditas, haecceitas, aliquiditas, aleitas.*\(^8\)

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\(^4\) Ibid., pp.593-594.  
\(^5\) Ibid., p.594.  
\(^6\) Ibid.  
\(^7\) Ibid.  
\(^8\) Ibid., p.593.
Work-Righteousness

Work-righteousness was one of the charges against the scholastic theology, brought by Martin Luther. It was, he insisted, committed to the idea of work-righteousness; whatever occasional protest might be made against the conception, he maintained that this thought of work-righteousness was so interwoven with its warp and woof that the whole must be swept away ere the old and true Christian Theology could be rediscovered. It can be explained in the following ways.

The famous Aristotle concept was “Do what lies within you.” “Do the best you can.” While applying this to theology, this concept means that fellowship with God can only take place when the sinner is raised to likeness to God. But how is the sinner to accomplish this feat? Aristotle spoke of self-improvement, a personal modification through practice. People acquire skills by practicing them. A person becomes a guitarist by practicing playing the guitar. A person becomes a good citizen by practicing civic virtues. Through such habits or practices, one’s ethics become a kind of second nature.

The Medieval theologians took this idea and applied it to acquiring righteousness before God. So, the famous scholastic phrase “do what lies within you” meant that salvation was a process that took place within someone as they perfected themselves. The question again was, “How do I know if I have done enough good works to merit salvation?”

Sophistry

The other thing declared by Luther was sophistry. By that he meant that Scholasticism played with the outsides of doctrine, asked and solved questions which

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had nothing to do with real Christian theology. According to him, the imposing intellectual edifice was hollow within, that its deity was not the God who could never be revealed by metaphysics larded with detached texts of scripture, but the abstract entity of pagan philosophy. With an unerring instinct he fastened on the Scholastic devotion to Aristotle as the reason why what initially professed to be Christian theology was changed into something else.\(^{399}\)

**Own Philosophy of Christ**

The priority was given to Aristotelianism during the scholastic period. Therefore, the Schoolmen, through their rational ability, introduced Christ according to their own philosophy. For Luther, the Scholastics allowed Aristotle to dominate theology with unbiblical assumptions and outlooks. In part this reflects Luther’s deep suspicion of Aristotle’s ethics, which he regarded as severely detrimental to a right understanding of the doctrine of justification.\(^{400}\)

Erasmus of Rotterdam believed that Scholasticism was a sterile and arid approach to Christian truth that focused too much and too long on speculation about totally impractical issues and questions. Roger E. Olson says that against it he posed another view of Christ that placed ethics and spirituality at the center of theology and philosophy with Christ’s teachings as the model for fruitful Christian reflection.\(^{401}\)

**Fails to do Justice to Scripture**

Scholasticism fails to do justice to Scripture. Lectures on the Bible were no longer mandatory, and study of the writings of the church fathers had also declined. Dialectical subtleties became more and more the focus. This development worsened

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\(^{399}\) Lindsay, *A History of the Reformation*, p.69.


\(^{401}\) Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, p.315.
what was already a weakness in Scholasticism – its lack of historical sense. Later scholastics tended to confine themselves to extracts from the ancients and so lost the historical context and much of the meaning of the original writings. Alister E. McGrath brings out that this criticism is echoed throughout the Reformation and parallels the humanist determination to return ad fontes. Luther argued that Scholasticism detached the Christian faith from its roots in Scripture by interposing successive layers of interpretative glosses, hermeneutical devices, and philosophical assumptions between the text and its readers. The task of theology is to return directly to the Scriptural text.402

Finally, for many of the medieval scholastic theologians and philosophers, human reason could, with the help of God’s grace, discover the answers to virtually all conceivable questions of any real importance. However, at the height of Scholasticism, virtually everything was deemed accessible to human cognition and classification.403 In this context it is little wonder that Erasmus wanted to return to the simple Gospel, that Luther had no use for Aristotle, and that Calvin repeatedly attacked the fictions of the Schoolmen.404

403 Olson, The Story of Christian Theology, p.312.
4.2.3. Reformation Orthodoxy – Missed the Pendant in the Necklace

The Reformation breathed new life into Christianity that had grown corrupt with wealth and worldly power. It established the Bible as the sole authority of Christian faith and practice, removing the power of the Church from that position. Moreover, it reawakened an understanding of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. It also put the Bible back into the hands of the people so that they could have access to God’s special revelation for themselves.405 Further, Carter Lindsay notes that the Reformers urged people to judge all doctrines by Scripture; and all the churches turned to history to legitimate and bolster their individual claims to be a faithful community.406

However, following Luther’s death in 1546, a number of controversies arose within Lutheransism over which theological principles were central to faith and which were not, whether good works were necessary for salvation, if or how far one cooperated in one’s conversion, the role of law, the precise role of the sacraments in the mediation of grace, sin and the essence of man, and whether justification was only forensic (that is, solely God’s declaration, as Luther had taught) or whether it was infused.407 A few missiologists believe that there was no mission during the Reformation period as the Reformers were busy with doctrinal disputes. This proves that Reformation orthodoxy missed the pendant in the necklace. A few more weaknesses of the intellectual movements are listed below:

406 Lindsay, The European Reformations, pp.5-6.
Believed Justification was an Objective Event

The Reformation stressed that justification was purely an objective event, although its effects on the individual were subjective. In other words, the Protestants focused on God’s objective saving act in history in the incarnation instead of on the subjective appropriation of the believer’s redemption. They were supposed to stress that justification had to be experienced in a subjective act of rebirth, the establishment of a child-father relationship with God.

Satisfied with Theological Knowledge

The Reformers were satisfied with the commonly accepted *ordo salutis* that the spirit of God called the sinner and gave him the knowledge which lead to repentance and then to truly saving faith. Manfred W. Kohl believes that theological knowledge was not enough; one must experience salvation. Rebirth, an act of God, was the beginning of faith rather than a result of faith. Even more important, it was the beginning of a process of growth in which the new inner man, created by God, came more and more to control the life of the individual until his entire existence would reflect Jesus Christ. The natural man would be brought to a realization of his own invalidity and of the necessity of waking up out of his own self-conceit. He would undergo conversion, and would then be helped to take hold of Jesus Christ until Christ would have complete charge of his life, and he would be enabled to live by faith rather than reason.

Failed to stress Spiritual Experience

The Reformers did not distinguish between the natural and the born-again man, between the outer and inner, between the Christian in name only and the

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408 Erb, ed., *Pietists Selected Writings*, p.6.
Christian marked by the existence of inner life. They believed that through close relationship between the born-again man and God, one might experience complete victory over temptation, a concept which set the stage for perfectionism. However, the reformation orthodoxy failed to see that victory was possible only through a life of devotion and by stressing spiritual experience. Donald C. Frisk is right in stating that “the Word is most fully known in the experience of the believing community.”

Absence of Mission

Kenneth Latourette lists six causes contributing to this absence of missionary concern. They are 1) Protestantism’s struggle to establish itself, 2) its involvement in the wars of religion, 3) the Reformer’s eschatology, 4) the indifference of Protestant rulers to spreading the faith, 5) the absence of Protestant missionary machinery, and 6) the relative lack of contact with non-Christian people by predominantly Protestant countries until the latter part of the seventeenth century. Stephen Neill, in his book *A History of Christian Missions*, says, “In the Protestant world, during the period of Reformation, there was little time for thought of missions.” In accepting Neil’s view, Gustav Warneck, the father of missiology as a theological discipline, says, “We miss in the Reformers not only missionary action, but even the idea of missions, in the sense in which we understand them today.” In their opinion, they often view mission as reaching the unreached and crossing the seas.

Justinian Von Weltz, a noble man from an Austrian family, is one of the remarkable mission thinkers of the Reformation era. His two chief ideas were an

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uplifting of Christian life and a practical manifestation of faith by the extension of the Gospel in the non-Christian world. Here one can see a great theological breakthrough: missions in a living, practical Christianity that was unknown in Catholicism. He proposed the following three searching questions to the slumbering conscience of the Church:

1. Is it right that we, evangelical Christians, hold the Gospel for ourselves alone, and do not seek to spread it?
2. Is it right that in all places we have so many students of theology, and do not induce them to labor elsewhere in the spiritual vineyard of Jesus Christ?
3. Is it right that we spend so much on all sorts of dress and delicacies in eating and drinking etc… but have hitherto thought of no means for the spread the Gospel?

**Protestant Scholasticism**

The 17th century was at once the high era of Protestant systematic orthodoxy and the age when the first signs of its dissolution appeared. The axioms of the Reformation were worked out in a great and systematic body of doctrine, appealing always to reason and to Biblical authority and seldom to feeling or conscience. This period is known as the age of Protestant orthodoxy or scholasticism. Undoubtedly, Protestant scholasticism brought an “intellectual Pelagianism” in which the good works of the medieval church were exchanged for the works of understanding. Dale W. Brown reveals Aristotle, who had been thrown out the front door, quickly came in the back. Justification by faith became one of the dogmas instead of the source of dogma. Luther’s God, who was a Thou, became an It. The testimony of the Holy Spirit became a mere intellectual process of increasing acquaintance with the truth. Though there was apotheosis of
the Bible, the Scriptures were used primarily as proof texts to verify the creedal dogmas.\textsuperscript{415}

Schism

The great benefits of the Reformation came at the expense of the division of the Church. After the council of Acts 15, there was a sense that the Church was a unity, that debates and disputes should be brought to councils and settled, so that Christianity could speak with one voice. Even after the division between East and West, there was still a sense that this was not how things should be, that the divided halves of the Church would one day be reconciled. Luther did not intend to break the Church again, but that is what his actions did.

According to Keith Schooley,

\begin{quote}
The great failure of the Reformation was simply that it didn’t actually reform anything. It created something new, in which people who believed something different could have a place to exercise that belief. But it didn’t create the opportunity for people who have differing doctrinal convictions to be able to work through those convictions, perhaps come to a mediating position, and perhaps find unity and continue to worship together.\textsuperscript{416}
\end{quote}

Finally, it was an unpardonable mistake on the part of Reformers, who destroyed the monasteries and orders, which were the missionary wing of the Roman Catholic Church. “United we stand” the Reformers failed to co-operate among themselves to carry missions.

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{415} Brown, \textit{Understanding Pietism}, p.24.  \\
\textsuperscript{416} Schooley, “The Successes and Failures of the Reformation”
\end{flushright}
4.2.4. Liberalism – Looking always below

Liberation theologians say that theology must start with a “view from below” that is, with the sufferings of the oppressed. Within this broad framework, different liberation theologians have developed distinctive methodologies for “doing” theology. Gustavo Gutierrez, author of *A Theology of Liberation*, provides a representative methodology. He rejects the idea that theology is a systematic collection of timeless and culture-transcending truths that remains static for all generations. Gutierrez emphasizes that theology is not just to be learned, it is to be done. This contextual theology has its own flaws. For example, Christ’s salvation is seen as in one moment of history, a paradigmatic rather than an inimitable event. But the truth is, Christ does not spiritualize the eschatological promises. He gives them meaning and fulfillment today (Lk 4: 21); but at the same time he opens a new perspective by catapulting history towards total reconciliation.417 A few more weakness of this movement are listed below.

**Humanity at the Centre**

The most serious objections have been raised against liberation theology’s method and its view of the God-human relationship. Liberation theology places humanity at the centre and sees everything else at the side. J. Andrew Kirk, a British evangelical sympathetic to liberation theology, asked quite rightly whether its method is even possible. Can theory and reflection be made secondary to praxis? Does not “right praxis” presuppose some view of what is right and what is wrong? And does not this mean for the Christian that Scripture, not praxis, must be the ultimate norm? Sadly, Liberation theology does not even pay lip service to the need for personal

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repentance and faith. Gutierrez neglects the transcendent dimensions of grace, heaven, the eschatological kingdom of God, and the personal relationship with God through the living Jesus Christ.\footnote{Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, Twentieth Century Theology, (Secunderabad: OM Books, 1992), pp.223 - 224.}

**Ethnocentric**

Black theology, a branch of Liberation theology, was problematic because it was ethnocentric. Prior to 1960s theologians, regardless of their theological orientation, perceived their efforts and their discipline in terms of engagement in the quest for truth on behalf of all humankind. However, black theologians, in contrast, openly asserted that their task was properly limited to their own ethnic community. It was a theology by Blacks and for Blacks.\footnote{Ibid., p.209.}

**Theology of the Cross**

Liberation theology moves Christians to take seriously the social and political impact of Jesus’ life and death but fails to ground Jesus’ uniqueness in the reality of his deity. It claims that Jesus is different from human beings by degree, not by kind, and that his cross is the climax of his vicarious identification with suffering humankind rather than substitutionary death offered on our behalf to turn away the wrath of God and triumph over sin, death, and the devil. D. D. Webster says, “A theology of the cross that isolates Jesus’ death from its particular place in God’s design and shuns the disclosure of its revealed meaning is powerless to bring us to God, hence assuring the perpetuity of our theological abandonment.”\footnote{D. D. Webster, “Liberation Theology” in Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, 2nd edition, edited by Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), p.688.}
Excessive Emphasis on the Poor

Liberation theology’s emphasis on the poor gives the impression that the poor are the only object of God’s concern. Only the cry of the oppressed is the voice of God, everything else is projected as a vain attempt to comprehend God by some self-serving means. This is a confused and misleading notion. According to Webster, Biblical theology reveals that God is for the poor, but it does not teach that the poor are the actual embodiment of God in today’s world. Liberation theology threatens to politicize the Gospel to the point that the poor are offered a solution that could be provided with or without Jesus Christ.421 Sadly, liberation thinkers tended to ignore the important differences between means and ends. They showed little tolerance for other Christians who shared their goal of aiding the poor but advocated different means. Some critics question whether it is Biblically or theologically sound to say that God “favours” the poor, solely, because they are poor. Sam Portaro warned that “when we accept the idea of a divine bias, we are being unfaithful to our ministry to the whole people of God.”422

Theology of the Rupture

The theology of liberation is both a continuation and a rupture from the brand of political theology. For example, it has valued the emphasis on universal human history as the medium and context of God’s acts of salvation. The theology of liberation tends to underline the differences rather than the similarities. For this reason, certain authors have called it a ‘theology of rupture’. The following, then, are its main criticisms of ‘political theology’:

422 Grenz and Roger E. Olson, Twentieth Century Theology, p.223.
1. The methodological starting point is philosophical idealism which has hindered its use of certain tools of socio-political analysis as a means of bridging the hermeneutical gap between past event and present reality.
2. The language concerning revolution, for lack of an adequate awareness of the essential injustice of capitalism, is vague, unrealistic and non-conflictive.
3. It makes an unjustified distinction between ethics and dogmatic theology.
4. It still allows the secular realm too much autonomy, showing that it has not fully abandoned a ‘theology of secularisation’.
5. Its proponents are not committed in practice to changing society, only to explaining and criticising it.

Inadequate Ecclesiology

Liberation theologies at their best reaffirm liberation as a Biblical concept in all its wholeness. However, it has its own flaws. Chris Sudgen while quoting M. M. Thomas says,

The outcastes, the poor and the orphans saw Christian faith as the source of a new humanising influence and the foundation of a human community. Where conversion was genuine, whether of individuals or of groups, the converts saw salvation in Christ not only in terms of individual salvation, of heaven after death, but also as the spiritual source of a new community on earth in which their humanity and status were recognised. It was the promise of humanization inherent in the gospel of salvation, which led to the influx of the oppressed into the church.

Hermeneutical method

Liberation theology’s weakness stems from an application of misleading hermeneutical principles and a departure from historic Christian faith. Liberation theology rightly condemns a tradition that attempts to use God for its own ends but wrongly denies God’s definitive self-disclosure in Biblical revelation. According to Webster, to argue that our conception of God is determined by the historical situation

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423 Kirk, Liberation Theology, pp.26-27.
is to agree with radical secularity in absolutizing the temporal process, making it
difficult to distinguish between theology and ideology.\footnote{Webster, “Liberation Theology”, p.688.}

Further, many critics have objected to liberation theology’s use of Marxism.
Marxist categories cannot serve as a tool of social analysis without being drawn into
its attendant atheistic view of history and humanity. Marxism’s understanding of the
economic causes of human alienation, for instance, cannot be separated from Marx’s
view of the human person as a product of one’s own self-creation through work rather
than as a creature of God.\footnote{Grenz and Roger E. Olson, Twentieth Century Theology, p.223.}

In summary, firstly, Liberation theology substitutes a dialectical ideology for
the institutional Church. Secondly, it performs in the interests of the clarity and
consistency of orthopraxis, rather than orthodoxy.\footnote{Kirk, Liberation Theology, p.186.}
Andrew J. Kirk says, if the Bible makes no original contribution to the praxis of liberation, then it should be made clear
that the hermeneutic of liberation is using the Bible in an ‘inspirational’ rather than
‘objective’ sense – i.e. as a means to further ends over which the Bible has had no
decisive way.”\footnote{Ibid., p.189.}

In Liberation theology, the emphasis shifts from saving belief to saving work.
Likewise the emphasis shifts from who God is to how God acts, where the tendency is
to identify the action of God with our action to the extent that we are the church, the
sacrament of God. Simultaneously, there is a tendency to interpret the Holy Spirit,
who retreats in significance, simply in terms of our spirituality, the “spirituality of
liberation.”\footnote{Andrew Walker, Betraying the Gospel: Modern Theologies and Christian Orthodoxy,