

Unit 16 Assignment

The Bright Succession



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Assignment Unit 16

The bright Succession

1 Section F Methodism

Identify the theological concerns which were current at the time and outline them in a memorable way for a congregation today.



The History

Wesley didn't intend to create a new denomination. His view was similar to Christ's own. Just as Christ came to correct the problems with the Jewish religion, Wesley aimed at correcting the deficiencies in the Church of England. In each case, the existing religion resisted changes and a new movement began.

The Church of England was about proper liturgy held in a church. The common person was left out. Wesley went out to the people and preached a simple message in plain English. He started a system of preachers and lay workers that spread across the country. The fact that the Church of England then refused to allow the Wesley's to preach in churches and denied communion to Methodist converts no doubt pushed the creation of a new denomination.

In 1725, he recognized that you cannot be half a Christian, and he pledged his whole-hearted service to the ministry. While he served in word and deed, he didn't really serve with his heart until his experience at Aldersgate Street on May 24, 1738. The following year, he joined George Whitefield in Bristol and began open-air preaching. His listeners were divided into societies, and those societies into smaller classes.

The Background

The eighteenth century evangelical revival has already started in Germany with the Pietists from the Lutheran and Moravian churches. Their emphasis on small group Bible study and prayer was something John Wesley was to use to great effect. Wesley

saw the organised church as too exclusive and he believed in the universality of Christ's message. That by the grace of God;

All needed to be saved
 All can be saved
 All can know they are saved
 All can be saved to the uttermost

Wesley's simple message was for all people, that all people can be saved by the grace of God. His doctrine summed into four points

Justification by faith

God's great free gift of forgiveness of sin. Belief in and acceptance of Jesus, the Son of God allows all to taste that grace. It is a platform from which to grow in faith and truth.

New birth

Together, in communion with God we start afresh, a new direction for life.

Witness of the Spirit

The realisation of being a child of God, part of His inheritance and member of the Heavenly family.

Perfect love

Struck in awesome wonder of God's love we respond in love toward God and all humanity.

The issue

There is a parallel between Jesus and the Jewish church and Wesley and the church of England of his day. They had both become centred around themselves rather than God. What caused problems for both was pointing out to the authority where they were going wrong. Wesley was keen to be inclusive and stress there was nothing in the Methodist denomination that wasn't scriptural and available to all who love God.

"What then is the mark? Who is a Methodist, according to your own account?" I answer: A Methodist is one who has "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him;" one who "loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!" John Wesley

We should therefore look to our own practices in the light of scripture and ask serious questions about whether our religious activities are excluding anyone; because of our speech, our music, our ceremonies or other behaviour.

We do not place our religion, or any part of it, in being attached to any peculiar mode of speaking, any quaint or uncommon set of expressions. John Wesley

This is as true now as it was 300 years ago and 2000 years ago.

2 Section E The reformation

Imagine yourself present at the time and write an open letter to a Christian friend describing what has happened.

Dear Friend

Greetings in the Grace of God and love of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

It is within a background of European turmoil and the breakdown of society because of the Black Death plague I write, There is great weaknesses of the Catholic Church to answer the most basic of theological questions and the questionable religious rituals and practices along with the corruption and abuses of power in Church with the sale of Indulgences and other forms of forgiveness and even of church offices themselves. But as things have happened in Europe so it is happening here in England and I write that you will be encouraged the work of God in this world.

Martin Luther began to change the church when he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church. That document contained an attack on papal abuses and the sale of indulgences by church officials. But Luther himself saw the reformation as something far more important than a revolt against ecclesiastical abuses. He believed it was a fight for the gospel. Luther even stated that he would have happily yielded every point of dispute to the Pope, if only the Pope had affirmed the gospel. At the heart of the gospel, in Luther's estimation, was the doctrine of justification by faith--the teaching that Christ's own righteousness is imputed to those who believe, and on that ground alone, they are accepted by God.

Huldreich Zwingli the appointed pastor of Glarus; and people's vicar at Einsiedeln began to formulate the ideas that were to lead him to renounce the church of Rome.

Zwingli became a reformer through his studies and only later to adopt Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone,. The real beginning of the reformation in Switzerland was Zwingli's lectures on the New Testament. Armed with Erasmus' edition of the Greek text he discarded scholastic commentaries and proclaimed the sole authority of the word of God as revealed in Scriptures. The Catholic Mass was replaced by a reformed service at Zwingli's church in Zürich and the marriage of priests was accepted. After his death Zwingli's work was continued in Switzerland by John Calvin.

John Calvin, a French theologian, was then the guiding spirit of the Protestant Reformation. "God," he wrote, "at last turned my course in another direction by the secret rein of his providence." His position in France became precarious when his friend Nicholas Cop, rector of the University of Paris, gave a public address supporting reform. Eventually Calvin was forced to flee in to Basel, Switzerland. There he produced a small book about his new reformed beliefs. It was designed to offer a brief summary of essential Christian belief and to defend French Protestants, who were then undergoing serious persecution, as true heirs of the early church.. The Institutes presents with unmatched clarity a vision of God in his majesty, of Christ as prophet,

priest, and king, of the Holy Spirit as the giver of faith, of the Bible as the final authority, and of the church as the holy people of God. Its doctrine of Predestination is Calvin's deduction from his belief in human sinfulness and God's sovereign mercy in Christ. People admired the courage of his conviction that all of life should glorify God.. His influence spread throughout the Western world.

And so to the story here in England. This is really two stories at once. The first is a story about ordinary people. The second is about Kings and Queens, and how they made changes in the way the Church worshipped and worked.

Ordinary people are divided in their opinions. To some, the old ways were best, and changes are disliked. These changes include new forms of service and the loss of some of the elaborate clothes worn by the priest. Monasteries are being closed, and sometimes destroyed. But, all the time, the movement for change is getting stronger. It affects every level of society. One of the things that brought it about was the spread of ideas from the Continent, ideas like those Luther had put forward. Merchants who brought goods in their ships also smuggled in Lutheran books.

The biggest boost to the cause of reform is the translation of the Bible into English. This is something more bitterly opposed by the English Church than it is in almost any other country. The pioneer is a man called William Tyndale and he said his life's work is to make sure that an ordinary ploughman would know more of the Bible than the priests he had met. For that cause he travelled abroad, because translating the Bible in England had become too dangerous. He lived on the run and translated almost all the Bible into English.

Reading the Bible in English has helped the cause of reform.. In addition, when the State began to favour the cause of reform, Henry VIII told scholars to do what he'd once forbidden. He has had official Bible translations made, and most of the words in them follow Tyndale's translation.

Henry VIII has become involved in changing the Church in England for reasons of his own. King Henry had married Catherine of Aragon, the widow of Henry's older brother, Arthur and in 18 years of marriage, she had eight children. All of them died except a daughter, Mary. Henry believes that he had done wrong by marrying his brother's wife. That made him feel God was punishing him for his mistake so he began to feel the answer was to divorce Catherine. He became even more sure this was what he should do when he fell for Anne Boleyn. But there were problems. Such a divorce needs the permission of the Pope and he was not willing to fit in with Henry's wishes. To do so would offend Catherine's uncle, the Emperor Charles V, the most powerful ruler in Europe.

The answer was to assert that England was itself an Empire. It's Church should not be governed by a ruler outside the country. Then the new Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, was willing to grant the divorce. The result of this was to split the Church in England away from the authority of

the Pope and in turn Henry was declared to be the "Supreme Head" of the English Church. Henry's own aims focused now on reducing the wealth and influence of the Church. He closed down the monasteries. and shared their land and money with his supporters. Many English people fear that being cut off from the Roman church will cut them off from God; others are worried by so much change.

But for most, the King's actions are acceptable. His claims sounded "patriotic". Many people had been put off by dishonest or proud churchmen, and so felt they had got what they deserved. But Henry's own beliefs have changed little. In earlier years, he had written a book in support of the Pope against Luther. He continued to believe most of what he wrote then. But he gave freedom to other men to make changes he himself would not do.

So Thomas Cranmer is preparing a Prayer Book that will come into use soon. Thomas Cromwell, his "First Secretary", sponsored the translation of the Bible and things like these are preparing the way for more clearly Protestant changes.

Two other things that King Henry is doing are vital. He himself sometimes supports reform and at other times he turns back to the old ways. But all the time he protects Thomas Cranmer from his enemies. This allows Cranmer to continue his work of revising the services of the church. King Henry's son, Edward, is tutored by men with firm Protestant beliefs and when Edward becomes King, because of Henry's actions, he will carry on the reform of the Church.

Those these are frightful and sometimes treacherous times of change I pray that the greater will of God will prevail and I shall be able to write again with news.

Your friend and servant in Christ

Rob Newton

3 Section G Movements of renewal

Where you might feel some disagreement with the views expressed. Present a well-argued case against the prevailing judgement of the church.

(this arrogant question assumes the views of the module writer are the prevailing judgement of the church)

The Charismatic movement

The many church expressions that fall under the title of Charismatic are wide and varied and probably as impossible to sweepingly categorise as one, as are all the more traditional congregations of protestant denominations. When we view their inherent benefits and negative points as a whole therefore we could take a narrow, blinkered, view of what is far broader than it seems. It is also seemingly easy to acknowledge the benefits of the Charismatic movement without actually incorporating them into Methodist worship life.

The Charismatic movement should not be understood as a group of separate organisations but more as an attitude within and outside the mainstream denominations, including Methodism.

Spontaneous prayer, praise, dance and drama.

Worship is said to be a purely 'vertical' activity, one that is between the individual and God in both directions. Corporate worship therefore adds a further dimension of individuals worshipping in unison together. Worship should not be presented but led from the front so that members of the congregation are assisted to worship vertically. The addition of drama allows much more involvement and for scripture or theme illustration to come alive. Not everyone that enjoys music can sing well and can be gifted more towards movement and dance or playing an instrument. Their ability to worship with their gifts should not be stifled because corporate singing is the norm.

We see throughout scripture God using the most unlikely of people in His work. It is also more difficult to respond to the Spirit's call if whoever is presiding is concentrating on leading the people. Those who feel called to speak in prayer need time and space during worship to do so either in isolation or on behalf of the whole gathering.

Prophesy and tongues

The outpouring of emotion, the word of the moment, the specific message, utterances that come from a people in communion with God. These are often considered out of place and not the done thing in more traditional congregations. Where it has happened the instance is ignored or glossed over. There is little to no space allowed in Methodist service order to give opportunity for the congregation to share in this way.

Prayer and fellowship groups

From its routes in small house church gatherings the Methodist church has grown to see large congregations occupying impressive buildings as a positive outcome. Small groups doing mostly secular activities fulfil a friendship role though not a fellowship

role. Only in recent years has there been a return to weekday house groups (home church) where worship, teaching, prayer and study are shared in small groups. The Sunday service, which should then be a celebration gathering of the whole church body has yet to materialise and continues to attempt to fulfil too many functions.

Songs of praise

Renewal does bring songs, but not to revive an ailing hymnody but to overlay it with secular understanding and relevance in contemporary society. Worship music can remain stationary because it is known and comfortable and without noticing can become a re-enactment of an era long past. More arguments about worship are about the type and style of worship music than any other item in the service. The congregation are not likely to have heard the prayers before the service, or the sermon, or the children's address, or the notices, in fact repeating other items in worship from several hundred years previously and continuously week after week would soon be brought to the Ministers attention. Why then do we do exactly that with worship music?

The module writer's comment that there is a danger it could 'take over' and be 'self indulgent' has little credence when weighed against everything else we have that is new, fresh and relevant.

Healing of body mind and spirit

Healing services or a part of the service for healing are fairly common though there is an issue with this. Specific prayer for healing in any way has to have the expectation that it can work. If there is that expectation and there is healing then should we not make more of a song and dance about it? The work of God in this way can be spectacular or subtle but in either case let us openly praise God for His healing power.

Lively preaching

Twenty first century humans are physiologically different to their predecessors. The great oral traditions of previous centuries disappeared with the advent of moving pictures and as a consequence most people's purely oral concentration level will struggle after five or six minutes. Impassioned and lively preaching is more likely to capture the listener for longer than a stationary monotone presenter whatever the message.

The gospel message should always expect results, whether from the pulpit or across the coffee table there should be life changing results by the power of the Spirit in the gospel we proclaim.

Partnership

We are one body though we are made up of a myriad of different skill and gifts. All should be used to their best effect for the benefit of the worshipping community in love, and with tolerance towards one another. Many a congregation split is due to one group wishing to try something different and another being intolerant of that change. An authoritarian leader presiding over a congregation of either Charismatic or more

traditional stance will restrict the individual worship of the people. Freedom of expression between worshipper and God is the dangerous but necessary element of Spirit filled corporate worship.

4 Section C Doctrines and Creeds

outline theological issues raised in that section and consider how two of those issues might exercise a congregation today.

Doctrines

The word originates from the Latin *doctrina*, that which is taught or instructed. There is distinct difference between the terms use in the Old and New testaments in that the Old Testament Rabbis instructed a systematic doctrine to be learnt and consequently believed whereas Jesus taught through parables and stories that challenged and exercised the mind until a conclusion was reached and believed.

Jesus' teaching as recorded in the gospels were discursive, relating to new interpretations of the law to the contemporary needs of the followers. The doctrine of the early church directly resulted from the instruction of Jesus seen in the light of His death and resurrection and the experiences of Jesus' followers. This doctrine was a set of fundamental principles accepted by the body of believers.

Essentially that:

Jesus was the messiah (Acts 3:18)

He rose from the dead (Acts 2:24)

Faith in Jesus name was essential to salvation (Acts3:16)

Though these theological ideas were seen as orthodox, right worship, there were other theologies that were rejected as heresy:

Gnosticism.

The focus of Gnostic redemption is not on God, but ultimately upon the individuals self-understanding and the resulting freedom it provides. The Christ is seen as an intermediary between the divine and the human world assisting in awareness of this special knowledge.

Docetism.

This teaching purports that Jesus' incarnation, human form, was only an matter of appearance, that he always remained wholly divine. The suffering and crucified Jesus were not actions the divine Christ took part in.

The early church struggled with heresy and discussion over right doctrine, much over the humanity of Christ Jesus and the relationship between humankind and God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The essence of belief that is Christianity needed to be condensed into an ordered form that would be the basis for the creeds we still use today.

Creeds

The earliest of creeds were a catch phrase statement of faith as "Jesus is Lord" but left open they needed to address the questions that sprang from heresy. Over the years the creed was extended to encapsulate the very basic premise of Christian faith. The translation of the Apostles creed in use today from the seventh or eighth century sets out the main points of the gospel story that are held by followers as crucial to faith and the creed from Nicaea 325AD elaborates some aspects to further clarify the churches core convictions.

As Christians of all ages these are the most basic of statements we can profess to be true. We can believe that one who believe in their truth can trust in Jesus and the gospel message and the promises of God written in scripture. Though these statements are not flippant catch-phrases to be uttered lightly but are deeply significant and life changing words to be revered.

The use of creeds today

It can be an enlightening exercise for today's congregations to break down the creed and illuminate the church's orthodoxy held for nearly two thousand years. The awesome wonder that from generation to generation, from era to era the same basic principals of the Christian faith remain through the years of theological study and debate.

The apostles' creed can be used as an argument against heresy as Gnosticism for example and in presenting that argument the creed is expounded and understood.

A creed generally emphasizes the beliefs opposing those errors that the compilers of the creed think most dangerous at the time. The Creed of the Council of Trent, which was drawn up by the Roman Catholics in the 1500's, emphasized those beliefs that Roman Catholics and Protestants were arguing about most furiously at the time. The Apostles' Creed, emphasizes the true humanity, including the material body, of Jesus, since that is the point that the heretics of the time, the Gnostics, denied.

The Apostles' Creed is as follows:

*I believe in God the Father Almighty,
Creator of Heaven and Earth,*

The Gnostics held that the physical universe is evil and that God did not make it.

*I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, Our Lord,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the Virgin Mary,*

The Gnostics were agreed that the orthodox Christians were wrong in supposing that God had taken human nature or a human body. Some of them distinguished between Christ, whom they acknowledged to be in some sense divine, and the man Jesus, who was at most an instrument through whom the Christ spoke. They held that the man Jesus did not become the bearer or instrument of the Christ until the Spirit descended upon him at his baptism, and that the Spirit left him before the crucifixion, so that the Spirit had only a brief and tenuous association with matter and humanity.

Others affirmed that there was never a man Jesus at all, but only the appearance of a man, through which appearance wise teachings were given to the first disciples. Against this the orthodox Christians affirmed that Jesus was conceived through the action of the Holy Spirit thus denying the Gnostic position that the Spirit had nothing to do with Jesus until his Baptism, that he was born, which meant that he had a real physical body, and not just an appearance, of a virgin which implied that he had been special from the first moment of his life, and not just from the baptism on.

Suffered under Pontius Pilate,

There were many stories then current about gods who died and were resurrected, but they were offered as myths, as non-historical stories symbolic of the renewal of the vegetation every spring after the seeming death of winter. If you asked, "When did Adonis die, you

would be told either, "Long ago and far away," or else, "His death is not an event in earthly time." Jesus, on the other hand, died at a particular time and place in history, under the jurisdiction of Pontius Pilate, Procurator of Judea from 26 to 36 AD, or during the last ten years of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius.

*was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.*

Here the creed hammers home the point that he was really dead. He was not an illusion. He was nailed to a cross. He died. He had a real body, a corpse, that was placed in a tomb. He was not merely unconscious, his spirit left his body and went to the realm of the dead. It is a common belief among Christians that on this occasion he took the souls of those who had died trusting in the promises made under the Old Covenant Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Isaiah, and many others, and brought them out of the realm of the dead and into heavenly glory. But the creed is not concerned with this point.

The reference to the descent into Hell, or Sheol is here to make it clear that the death of Jesus was not just unconsciousness or a coma, but death in every sense of the word.

*On the third day he rose again,
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.*

*I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,*

The Gnostics believed that the most important Christian doctrines were reserved for a select few. The orthodox belief was that the fullness of the Gospel was to be preached to the entire human race. Hence the term "catholic" or universal, which distinguished them from the Gnostics.

*the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,*

The Gnostics considered that what men needed was not forgiveness, but enlightenment. Ignorance, not sin, was the problem. Some of them, believing the body to be a snare and delusion, led lives of great abstinence. Others, believing the body to be quite separate from the soul, held that it did not matter what the body did, since it was completely foul anyway, and its actions had no effect on the soul. They accordingly led lives that were not abstinent at all. Either way, the notion of forgiveness was alien to them.

the resurrection of the body,

The chief goal of the Gnostics was to become free forever from the material world and the bonds of the body, and to return to the heavenly realm as Pure Spirit. They totally rejected any idea of the resurrection of the body.

and the life everlasting. Amen


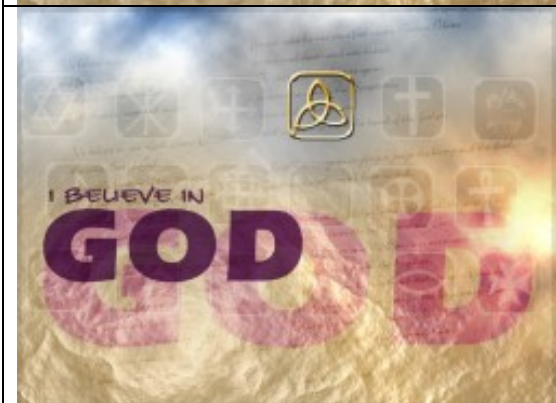
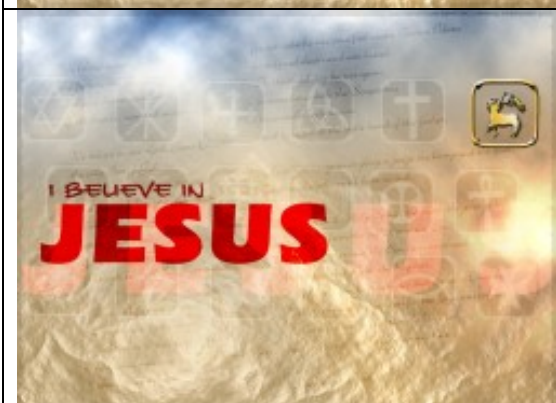

Creeds are also effectively used as corporate worship items and either spoken by all or by small groups on behalf of the congregation. It is good opportunity for congregational participation in some fashion and important that as many of those gathered should be involved as possible.

The challenge is to make it importantly memorable as a profession of faith. To this end it is often recited standing or in another ceremonial way. It may be helpful to give a hand out with the creed written on to take away as the congregation leave rather than part of the normal service sheet to give it more emphasis.

It can also be accompanied by appropriate imagery or symbolism to re-enforce the oral message. An image of some form can trigger the memory of an important message and as the basis of our faith there can be few things more important than remembering in what we believe.

There follows an example of imagery useable with the Nicene creed.

Rob Newton

	<p style="text-align: center;">The Nicene creed</p> <p>We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen</p>
	<p>We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God,</p>
	<p>begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man.</p>
	<p>For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;</p>

	<p>he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,</p>
	<p>and his kingdom will have no end.</p> <p>We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son.</p>
	<p>With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.</p> <p>We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.</p>
	<p>We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come.</p> <p>Amen.</p>