

SECTS, CULTS, SCHISMS, HERESIES

1 Cor 4:1-2, 14-21, 9:1-2; II Cor 10:7-11, 13:1-6

I. RECURRENT ASPECT OF HUMAN HISTORY: FACTIONALISM

1. Secular history: Greeks; Founders; Cherokee
2. Despite Jesus's concern, Church history replete with divisions

II. PROPER DEFINITIONS

1. Sect: a group with different religious beliefs from those of a larger group to which they belong
2. Cult: a relatively small group having religious beliefs or practices regarded by others as strange or sinister
3. Schism: split or division between strongly opposed sections or parties, differing in opinion or belief
4. Heresy: belief or opinion contrary to orthodox religious (especially Christian) doctrine

III. CONSTANT FACTORS/PATTERNS in FACTIONALISM (generally led by a strong-willed, often charismatic (indeed messianic) person

A. Early Church

1. Donatus & Donatism
 - a. Great issue: readmitting apostates amidst persecutions—311 schism & Donatus leads
 - b. Main tenet: only holy clergy can administer Sacraments; thus re-baptize converts
 - c. Contentious presence in North Africa for two centuries (one factor in Vandals' success), with Circumcellians illustrating fanatical aspects
2. Arius & Arianism
 - a. Great issue: full deity of Christ
 - b. Main tenet: "there was a time when Christ was not"
 - c. Massive shift in at times a majority of Christian churches, only corrected in time as Athanasius' work and witness slowly gain traction

B. Great Schism of 1054—Eastern Orthodox/Roman Catholic split decisive

1. Technical theological issue re procession of Holy Spirit from the Father (and the Son?)
2. Caesar or Pope underlying political/ecclesiastical issue

C. Medieval Sects

1. Variations: Waldensians in northern Italy; Cathars/Albigensians in southern France; Brethren of the Free Spirit in Germany; Wycliffe & Lollards in England; Huss in Bohemia
2. Patterns of heresy (says Ronald Knox): 1) dualistic account of creation & denial of Incarnation; 2) Manichean discipline; 3) denial of infant baptism; 4) irregular morality; 5) cult of simplicity; 6) merit of priest determines efficacy of his ministry; 7) true Church invisible; 8) anti-intellectualism;

D. Reformation Divisiveness & subsequent fractures

1. Luther & Lutherans (ALC & Missouri Synod & Wisconsin Synod)
2. Anabaptists & Baptists (verging on infinite numbers)
3. Henry VIII & Anglicans (now splitting into smaller communions, esp. in Africa)
4. Calvin & Reformed denominations

E. Pietistic/Wesleyan movements

1. Zinzendorf & Moravians
2. Wesley & Methodists (now rent by doctrinal/ethical issues)

F. Two Great Awakenings & American Christianity splinters

IV. ANY WAYS to RESTORE LOST/NEEDED UNITY?

- A. Begin Again: re-establish True, Primitive, NT church—e.g. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), resulting from Stone-Campbell Movement in 2d Great Awakening; Bible-only, "Christian" simply
- B. Undo Past Divisions—ecumenical movements, organizational movements, documents; Evangelical Alliance (1846); Federal Council of Churches (1910); World Council of Churches (1948)
- C. Bring Everyone Home—Vatican II and lofty aspirations
- D. Merge congenial factions: e.g. United Brethren & Methodist Episcopal churches form United Methodists
- E. Accept on-going disputes, divisions, fights as unavoidable, given man's sinfulness
- F. Posing "true church" as a spiritual union of all believers, whatever denomination (thus assenting to the possibility of some being saved despite denominational differences)

V. PAUL'S SOLUTION CLEAR? DOABLE?