

Church History: Self-Deceived 1850 –

(Part 2)

What led to this self-deception?

“During the Medieval centuries and until about 1700, the truth of Christianity was largely unquestioned within Christendom. The Reformation debates concerned what is true Christianity. But whether Christianity is true was all but unquestioned. The eighteenth century saw the emergence of a significant movement, Deism, which advocated a simplified and ‘pure’ religion based on reason, as an alternative to the superstitions of Christian revelation. Deism challenged the church from outside and by the end of the eighteenth century the theology of the churches remained predominantly orthodox. But during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries this picture has significantly altered.

“In the modern world, the Christian faith has had to face a wide range of challenges:

Rationalism: In the seventeenth century on a small scale and in the eighteenth century on a much larger scale, people began to attack Christianity in the name of reason. With Deism this took the form of a rival concept of God and religion; before long it was to become an attack on God and religion. In the nineteenth century atheism and agnosticism become common for the first time in the Christian West. Confidence in the power of reason has waxed and waned in the modern world, but the attack on revelation has continued unabated.

Science: The scientific method implies the testing of all claims and the refusal to accept any authority as beyond criticism. The method has been immensely successful in science but has encouraged similar skepticism towards authority in other areas where it might not be so applicable.

Historical Criticism: In the nineteenth century, historical criticism emerged. The critical historian thinks no longer in terms of authorities, which would rarely be questioned, but of sources, which must be questioned and tested. This approach has been applied to Christian history with devastating effect. The Bible came to be seen less as an authority to be accepted and more as a source to be criticized. In the same way, the records of the life of Jesus Christ were examined and attempts were made to present a radically new picture of him.

Secularization: As the Christian faith has ceased to command universal acceptance, society has turned to other ideological bases. For much of the world that has meant adopting a new secular ‘religion’, Marxism-Leninism. In the West, society is based on secular, non-religious assumptions. Religion is

increasingly seen as a private affair for the individual, a matter for personal preference.

“All of these changes have profoundly challenged Christian theology. Underlying them is the rejection of authority. Until the last century Christianity was all but universally seen in Christendom as a ‘given’, as a revelation from God which must be accepted by faith. But since the last century the very idea of a revelation has been radically questioned – not just by unbelievers, but by theologians within the mainstream churches.”

“Christian Thought” Tony Lane pp.180-18

“A series of cultural shocks raised widespread questions about the truth or relevance of traditional evangelical beliefs.

“The first shock came from Charles Darwin’s pen. In 1859 he published *The Origin of Species*, perhaps the most important book of the century. Darwin’s evolutionary theory presented a major challenge to Christians. The book argued that evolution took place by a mechanism called natural selection. Various species seek to survive. The stronger ones that can adapt to their environment endure; species that are weaker and prove unable to adapt die off. Many believers anticipated where this idea would lead. Would such a theory eventually leave room for a creating or sustaining God? How was the biblical story of creation to be understood?

“The second shock to the traditional faith came from the increasing industrialization of American society and the rush to the cities. People came not only from America’s hinterland but from Germany, Norway, Italy, and other European countries. Most of the new immigrants brought religious opinions alien to the traditional way Protestant Americans had viewed their country and their Bibles.

“The third and most direct assault on confidence in the Scriptures came in the form of higher criticism of the Bible. As more and more seminary and college professors took advanced degrees in the leading European universities, critical views become increasingly dominant in American higher education and eventually in many major denominations.

Taken together these shocks were part of the general shift in Western culture from Christian to secular forms of thought and behavior.”

“Church History” Bruce L. Shelley pp 408,409

How was Scripture rejected?

Deism attacked the **basis** of Scripture: not God revealed.

Science attacked the **author** of Scripture: there is no God.

Historical Criticism attacked the **source** of Scripture: not God, but men.

Secularization rejected the **authority** of Scripture: simply a private affair.

How does the Bible testify to its divine origin?

1. **The unity of the Bible:** “Here are sixty-six different books, written by some forty different authors, in three different languages, and the periods of authorship cover a score or more of centuries. These human writers were brought up in different countries, and were so remote from each other in time and space, that they could have had no mutual acquaintance and could neither have conspired for an evil end nor combined for the best purpose. The subjects on which they wrote were very diverse and various, some historical, some prophetic, some devotional, some ethical. The form of their writings was in some cases prose, and in others poetry, and yet, notwithstanding all these divergent elements, they have produced essentially one book. II Tim 3:16,17; II Peter 1:20,21
2. **The unique representations of the Bible.** “The uniqueness of its teachings demonstrates the uniqueness of its Source. The teachings of the Scriptures about God Himself, about man, about the world, about sin, about eternal punishment, about salvation, about the Lord Jesus Christ, are proof that the Bible is not the product of any man or any number of men, but is in the truth a revelation from God”
 - a. In relation to **God** – infinite, sovereign, triune, holy, and loving. Such a delineation of Deity is as far beyond man’s conception as the heavens are above the earth. No man, and no number of men, even invented such a God as this. Revelation 15:3
 - b. In relation to **man** – condemnable as debased in character and sinful in conduct. Unlike every other book in the world, the Bible condemns man and all his doings. Such a description of fallen human nature was never invented by the human mind. Man would never paint such an uncomplimentary picture of himself. Jeremiah 17: 9; Romans 3:10-18
 - c. In relation to **the world system** – evil and opposed to God. Man regards sin as a misfortune and even seeks to minimize its enormity. . . .But the Bible, unlike every other book, strips man of all excuse and emphasizes his culpability. I John 2:15-17
 - d. In relation to **the punishment of sin** – as proportionate to its heinousness and guilt. It is therefore evident that had the Bible been written by uninspired men, had it been a mere human composition, it certainly would not have taught the eternal and conscious torment of all who die out of Christ. The fact that the Bible does so teach is conclusive proof that it was written by men who spoke not of themselves, but as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. Romans 6:23 “The Divine Inspiration of the Bible” A W Pink p. 46
 - e. **In relationship to salvation from sin** – as absolutely independent of human merit and solely based upon the merits of

Christ. The independence and self-righteousness of man would disincline him from setting forth such a conception of salvation as that contained in the Scriptures, namely, by grace through a divinely provided atonement. Ephesians 2:8,9

3. **Fulfilled prophecy indicates the Bible’s divine origin.** No one but God can foretell the future with certainty; thus, if it can be shown that the Bible contains numerous predictions that have been literally fulfilled in history, we cannot doubt the Book came from God.
 - a. Regarding the **Jews:** The entire Jewish history bears witness to the truth of the sacred Scriptures. Their continued existence as a separate people proves that the prophecies concerning them were really given by God. II Chronicles 36:22
 - b. Regarding the **Gentiles:** Colossal image – partially fulfilled in history of Babylon Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The history of the first three of these empires mentioned has been the unfolding and fulfillment of the above prophetic picture. A partial fulfillment of the prophecy concerning the last empire is also historically true, but a large part of this prophecy awaits a future and larger realization. Daniel 2
 - c. Regarding **our Lord:** The Old Testament is full of Jesus. All prophecy has Him as its theme. The Scriptures give us the line of Messiah’s descent. He is to be the seed of the woman, of the race of Shem, of the line of Abraham, through Isaac and Jacob, of the tribe of Judah and the family of David. We also find predicted His entire life and ministry. His birthplace, His miraculous birth of a virgin, the sojourn into Egypt, His forerunner, the character of His ministry, His riding into Jerusalem upon an ass, His betrayal, trial and crucifixion, death, burial, resurrection and ascension. His second coming and reign – all these are predicted in unmistakable terms from Genesis to Malachi. Could this great array of messianic prophecy have found its fulfillment in one person, had it not come from God?
“Elemental Theology” Emory M. Bencroft pp. 32-35

‘In an 1873 address to the Evangelical Alliance, the Reverend Theodore Woolsey, retired President of Yale, asked, “In what sense can this country be called a Christian country? In this sense certainly,” he answered, “that the vast majority of the people believe in Christ and the gospel, and that Christian influences are universal, that our civilization and intellectual culture are built on that foundation...”

Fifty years later in 1924, H. L. Mencken, the widely read critic of American ways, remarked that “Christendom may be defined briefly as that part of the world in which, if any man stands up in public and solemnly swears that he is a Christian, all his auditors will laugh.”

“Church History” Bruce L Shelley p.409

