
UNIT 3 RELIGION, DIVERSITY AND DISSENT*

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3.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn about :

- the religious situation in Europe in the wake of the Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century,
- the proliferation of numerous religious sects which gave rise to new meanings about religion, society, and politics; and
- the contribution of these sects towards development of some modern ideas about religion and its role in society.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

From the early-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century, Europe was engulfed in a series of religious strife with both Protestants and Catholics of various kinds trying to prove their religious legitimacy, culminating in the long-drawn and devastating Thirty-year War (1618-48) involving most of European countries on either side of religious divide. However, this period was also innovative in religious sense. A large number of religious sects emerged throughout Europe putting forward ideas which could not be accommodated within established religions. This amazing religious fermentation has been termed as ‘radical Reformation’ as most of these sects derived their initial inspiration from the Protestant Reformation. It is about these ideas and movements that we are going to deliberate in this Unit.

3.2 REFORMATION AND COUNTER-REFORMATION

The evolutionary graph of religion in Europe was rudely disrupted in the sixteenth century owing to the Protestant revolt against the established orthodoxy of Roman Catholic Church. Both at the levels of doctrines and daily rituals, the Protestant

Reformation sought to make radical changes. On its part, Catholicism responded by initiating a reform process which was internal and relatively controlled. The content and sources of Catholic teaching were sought to be purified on the initiative of Catholic religious leaders themselves.

3.2.1 Protestant Reformation

The greatest religious dissent in early modern Europe was initiated by Martin Luther on 31 October 1517 when he questioned the Catholic Church on the issue of the ecclesiastical sale of indulgences by pasting his 'Ninety-five Theses or Disputations on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences' on the wall of the church in Wittenberg in Germany. He refused to recant his ideas and stood up to the Pope in Rome. In 1520, Luther published three treatises putting forward even more radical ideas about reform. In opposition to the Catholic Church, he asserted that the faith was the most important, if not the only, thing which could save the soul. Out of the seven sacraments recommended by the Roman Catholic Church, Luther retained only two – baptism and Holy communion. He rejected penance, monastic life, celibacy, poverty, and obedience as preached by Rome for attainment of salvation. Instead, he focused solely on faith which he believed was sufficient to save a sinner. This new reform movement permitted even the clergy to marry and lead a family life besides attending to priestly duties. By this move the distinction between the priest and the common people was eliminated paving the way for the 'priesthood of all believers'. The challenge to the papal authority, rejection of priestly mediation, and handing over of interpretive authority to the common believers were the forms of radical dissent which the Reformation initiated.

Luther appealed to the German princes and the people to support him in his quest for freedom from the Papal control from Rome and exhorted them to reform the churches in their territories. He found many adherents for his ideas among the clergy, common people, and princes in Central Europe. Protestant Reformation now began spreading to many non-German areas threatening the religious and political establishments. A significant number of people in many regions of Europe began adopting these ideas and some princes also were converted to Protestantism. In 1524, the first Protestant leagues were formed between some states. The governments in these states moved against Catholicism, abolished convents and monasteries, and turned them into schools and hospitals.

In Switzerland, Protestantism was preached initially by Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) who, in line with Luther, preached salvation through faith alone. He also emphasized that only the scriptures should form the basis of religious activities. In some respects, Zwingli went beyond Luther by his aggressive iconoclasm and in his belief that the poor were the real image of God, as well as in his views on Holy communion. This was the second most important trend within Protestantism.

The third most important stream of thought within Protestant Reformation was Calvinism which emerged in the 1540s. Jean Calvin (1509-1564) became active in France as the leader of Reformation. He later moved to Geneva to avoid persecution at home. Calvin, like Luther, severely criticised the sacrament of penance, but, unlike Luther, he did not emphasize on faith but rather on obedience to God's will as a way to salvation. In his treatise, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin put forward his famous doctrine of predestination. According to him, some persons were chosen by God for salvation, while the majority were

damned. Calvin also rejected many of the deeply-held Christian beliefs about poverty. He asserted that accumulation of wealth for the good of the community was not bad. However, wealth should be accompanied by sober life. With such views, Calvinism represented a new strand in Protestantism which later became known as the 'Protestant ethic'. Calvinism spread to many areas in Europe and became quite influential, particularly in Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Scotland, and England. Owing to its importance in terms of ideas and influence, Calvinism has also been called as the 'Second Reformation'.

3.2.2 Counter-Reformation

Faced with a serious threat to its authority, the Catholic Church tried to prepare its response to Protestantism as well as to reform itself from within. The Council of Trent, convened in 1545, eliminated the possibility of reconciliation by completely rejecting the Protestant ideas as heresies and anathema, and rejected the idea of marriage of clerics. It reaffirmed faith in the seven sacraments, the Eucharist, and in the authority of the Pope and the bishops, in the purgatory and power of indulgences.

The most aggressive response to Protestant Reformation was offered by the formation of the Jesuits. The founder of this group was Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), a Spanish nobleman, who wanted to re-establish Catholic orthodoxy throughout Europe through 'spiritual conversion'. He founded the Society of Jesus which was given official sanction by the Pope in 1540. The Jesuits underwent rigorous training and became aggressive crusaders for Counter-Reformation and they grew in number. They had contributed enormously in successful re-conversion of Poland to Catholicism, and in the success of the Catholic Reformation in Austria and German-speaking areas. They also went for preaching to various parts in the world.

The increasing tension between the states owing allegiance to Catholicism and Protestantism respectively was brought down by the Peace of Augsburg in 1555 which put forward the compromise that the religion of the ruler in respective states of the Holy Roman Empire would be the religion of the people and those not willing to adhere to it might migrate to other areas. In 1600, in Europe there were about 42 million people in regions identified as Catholic, about 28 million people under some form of Protestantism and about 28 million in the areas of Orthodox churches. During this period, loyalty to a particular Church signified loyalty to the reigning monarch.

Although some peace was achieved in 1555, the tension between the two broad Christian religions continued to simmer. The respective push for influence on the people and princes often brought them into conflict. Many small-scale conflicts, sometimes accompanied by a lot of brutality, kept occurring intermittently. The ambitions of political authorities also played a role in exacerbating the tension. In 1618, this long-drawn tension flared up into a long war – the Thirty-year War (1618-48) – which involved most of Europe and proved to be very devastating. Finally, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) established a settlement whereby religious and political influences were territorially demarcated until the French Revolution.

By the late seventeenth century, the broad pattern of association between religion, state and the population had become marked. Italy, Spain, Portugal, France,

Ireland, Belgium and much of Eastern Europe were strongly Catholic. England, Scotland, Holland, Germany, and Scandinavian countries were largely Protestant of various denominations. Russia, parts of Eastern Europe and parts of the Balkan countries belonged to the Orthodox Churches.

By the mid-seventeenth century, institutional Protestantism manifested as much doctrinal rigidity as Catholicism. Lutheranism now became closely identified with particular political powers. It became quite narrow in its outlook and discriminated against other Protestant sects such as Calvinism. Even Calvinism displayed equally strong predilection for absolutism and tyrannical orthodoxy. The Calvinist Geneva was an example for growing religious rigidity and submission to political authority.

This period also saw a concentrated attempt by both the Protestants and Catholics to wean people away from what they described as superstitions. In fact, efforts were made by the religious and intellectual elite to distinguish between the orthodox Christianity and the popular 'superstitious' versions of it, accompanied by intense efforts to convince the people about the supposed sinfulness of their religious belief-systems. Both these major forms of Christianity in Europe launched massive educational ventures to teach people about their uniform systems of beliefs and practices. Thus, so far as the popular religious culture, particularly related to magic, was concerned, the Catholics and Protestants presented a common front despite their otherwise sharp doctrinal differences.

Although the multiplicity of ideas and affiliations emerged even among the Catholics in the post-Reformation period, it was among the Protestants that the variety of ideas and organizations was staggering. There were numerous sects which emerged within a century of Reformation, all having their own ideas about Christianity and modes of salvation. It is these reformist sects that we are going to discuss in the next sections.

3.3 DISSENTERS AND NON-CONFORMISTS ON EUROPEAN CONTINENT

Although overwhelming majority of Europeans were associated with mainstream churches, such as Catholic, Lutheran, or Calvinist, there emerged many radical reformist groups on the margins. Inspired by Protestant revolt, but aware of the limitations of Protestantism, these marginal groups attempted to put forward their own ideology and establish their own churches. These religious movements differed from medieval heterodox sects in their emphasis on individual choice and voluntary association with the church. They rejected infant baptism, and believed in adult baptism and self-selection into the religious fold as radically different from hereditary or imposed religious affiliation. But these movements were also different from the post-Enlightenment self-selecting liberal churches in terms of their beliefs in some form of millenarianism and the willingness to sacrifice one's life for religious beliefs. Many of these radical sect held apocalyptic beliefs which implied that the end of the world was near and in which there would be a victory of the forces of God over the forces of evil.

These small or relatively large groups who professed Christian faith in general but dissociated from any big established Christian Church may be called as 'dissenters and non-conformists'. Dissent means doctrinal conflict with orthodoxy,

while non-conformism implies deviation from orthodox practice. Such groups were also castigated by the established churches as religious deviants. Clearly, such terms are relative because it was the norm set by the state churches which decided the issue of deviance. However, continued and intense religious activities by these groups resulted in the founding of 'free churches' of various sizes in Europe.

One of the first radical reformist movements to emerge in the wake of Luther's revolt in 1517 was 'Anabaptism' which endeavoured to thoroughly reconstruct the Christian community. Anabaptism means 'rebaptism' in Greek. Its followers believed that only those persons could follow the true Christian religion who knew what it meant in moral and ethical terms and were willing to accept their duties and obligations. Since it was not possible for the infants to comprehend the implications of religion, only willing adults should be allowed for baptism. It was noticed quite early in Germany, Switzerland, and Holland since the early 1520s onwards, in Italy from about 1540, and in Poland since 1565. In 1524, the Anabaptists rejected the practice of infant baptism and insisted on adult baptism. By 1525, they had broken from the mainstream Protestant Church. Its idea of an independent and voluntary church went against the Catholic order as well as against Protestant conceptualization of a national church. The role of the Anabaptists in the development of religious dissent in Europe was considerable.

There were many Anabaptist groups which were not uniform in ideology and organization. However, they advocated a form of congregational organization because they believed in voluntary membership rather than according to birth or territory. Propelled by religious thinkers in some parts of Germany and Switzerland, this sect rejected the emphasis given by both Catholicism and Protestantism to the community as a whole rather than to individuals. The Anabaptists believed that the real religious experiences could only belong to the already saved individuals. Thus, only those who were fully regenerate could form part of the reformed community through the ritual of the baptism of adult believers. Because of their subversive views, the Anabaptists faced oppression both by the established Protestant church and the state. There were many strands within the broader Anabaptist movement, but two groups became prominent. The first group were the 'Mennonites' who were followers of Menno Simons and who believed in pacifism and were gathered in reclusive communities in remote parts of the Netherlands. The second group were the 'Hutterites' who practiced community living on the basis of absolute sharing of all property.

In 1534, an Anabaptist group won in the elections in the town of Munster in Germany and formed the town government. Thousands of Anabaptists from various parts of Europe arrived there under the belief that it was the 'New Jerusalem'. In Munster, the Anabaptist government confiscated all the property of Catholic Church, abolished private property, prohibited the use of money and established a system of barter. Both the Lutheran and Catholic princes in Germany combined against them, invaded Munster in June 1535, and crushed the government.

In 1524, a fierce peasant revolt occurred in many German-speaking areas involving a large number of peasants, supported by many Anabaptists. The leader of the revolt was Thomas Munzer (c. 1491-1525) who was a priest and who combined religious reform with social revolution. He strongly spoke against the Catholic Church as well as against Luther because he believed that both bowed

their heads before the lay authorities. Luther, in his turn, denounced the peasant rebels in the strongest possible terms and asked the German princes to take strong action against them. Both the Catholic and Protestant priests joined together and with the political authorities to crush the revolt in 1525 when more than 100,000 peasants were killed. Munzer was also captured and brutally killed.

Another sect which radically questioned the established Christian belief was 'Anti-trinitarianism' (similar to the later 'Unitarianism') which rejected the mainstream doctrine of the established Churches about the trinity and emphasised on the sole majesty of God. According to it, the Godhead was a unity and did not consist of a trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Anti-trinitarian belief initially arose in Italy, but later shifted to Eastern Europe due to repression. During the 1560s, they established an Anti-trinitarian church in Poland. It reached to North America in the seventeenth century. In Transylvania, an Ottoman protectorate, there developed a full-blown form of Anti-trinitarianism.

On the European continent, the Netherlands served as the hub for radical Protestant and dissenting groups. A lot of 'heterodox' literature, which influenced many people and sects in various parts of Europe and America, was also published there. One of the important dissenting movements which was influenced by such writings was 'Pietism' in Germany which was opposed to both Lutheranism and Calvinism. The Pietists were not interested in theological intricacies and aimed for a simple creed with devotional dedication. It had strong mystical tendency. It flourished in Brandenburg (Germany) towards the end of the seventeenth century with their own university, orphanage, schools, and printing presses.

The origins of Pietism in Germany has been traced to the time between 1604 and 1610 when Johann Arndt (1555-1621) published his 'Four Books of True Christianity'. It provided a broad outline of ideological orientation of Pietism. However, generally the active phase of Pietism is associated with the activities of a preacher in Frankfurt, Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), when he founded the 'Circle of the Pious' in 1670 and published his tract 'Pia Desideria' in 1675. This tract severely criticised what the Pietists considered as wrong tendencies in Lutheranism, particularly the absence of practical and active piety. It was during this time that Pietism was organized as a 'socially discernible movement that placed itself in opposition to orthodoxy and brought forth new forms of ecclesiastical and religious communal life'. To demonstrate their idea of practical piety, the Pietists actively initiated work in the field of education and schooling. They sought to create perfect individuals through active inculcation of practical piety. Their emphasis on ascetic life, promotion of thrift and hard work, opposition to luxurious life, and anti-state attitudes marked them away from the official Lutheran Protestantism. The Lutherans resented the preaching of this sect and open conflict began between Lutheran orthodoxy and Pietism around 1789-90.

'Quietism', like Pietism, was an individualist form of religion which was strongly anti-clerical and with mystical orientation. Its enunciator was the Spanish priest Miguel Molinos who became known also in Rome and Paris. He was finally persecuted by Inquisition. Quietism preached 'annihilation of all individual activity in the love of God'. Another dissenting sect which had presence in France, northern Germany and the Netherlands was 'Labadism', founded by Jean de Labadie (1610-1674). The Labadists held the common Protestant views, but they also believed in equality of sexes and the idea of shared property.

Another important heterodox sect, Jansenism flourished in France during the seventeenth century. It was named after its originator Cornelius Jansen (1585-1638), who was a theologian. Jansenism had combined elements from both Calvinism and mysticism. It emerged in the context of Counter-Reformation in France. It was pitched against the Jesuits in France and Spain. The Jesuits, in turn, attacked it and Jansenism was condemned by the Roman Catholic Church in 1642. But the Jansenists persisted and received support from important theologians in France. Although the Jansenists kept seeking legitimacy from the Catholic Church, many of their tenets were closer to Protestantism, and they were quite often condemned as Protestants in disguise by their enemies. It is true that their veneration of the Bible, their theology of justification, and their indifference towards the Baroque cult of the saints were some of important ideas resembling Protestantism. Jansenist ideas also had influence on Methodism in England. Italy, Austria, and the Netherlands also had important pockets with Jansenist influences.

The non-conformists and dissenters were divided in many sects and groups, but all these together constituted a minority in European population. Nevertheless, they made a great impact on the process of modernity. Despite their origins in Europe, these dissenting Christian sects were influential in various parts of the world. Individual choice, adult baptism, voluntary membership of a church, mutual obligation, democratic decision-making, and pluralism were important attributes cultivated by these dissenters in the process of their struggle against the established churches.

In the eighteenth century, there was generally a decline in the radicalism displayed by many sects in the previous centuries. The Enlightenment and finally the French Revolution made the sects more religiously defensive turning to relatively traditional forms. During the eighteenth century, there was also a trend towards secularization and 'privatization of piety'. The number of people attending the churches declined and there also occurred a noticeable decline in the number of wills dedicated to the churches in case of deaths. There was a growing indifference towards theological issues. By the late eighteenth century, there was a significant decline in the number of books discussing religious issues. Several European states now also began to distance from religious establishments and promoted secularization of polity.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What do you understand by Reformation? Discuss the major trends within it.

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- 2) Write a note on dissenting and non-conformist trends on the European continent.

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3.4 RADICAL REFORMATION IN ENGLAND

Henry VIII of England broke away from the Roman Catholic Church and established a separate Church of England in 1534 after Pope Clement VII refused to grant him permission to divorce his wife. The Church of England followed Lutheran principles but in practice it was quite conservative compared to the reformed churches on the European continent. It was very harsh on heresies and burned several dozen persons at the stakes during the 1530s. At the same time, however, there was a large-scale dissolution of Catholic monasteries and the sale of their land.

During the seventeenth century, England emerged as the hotbed of divergent metaphysical thoughts of reformist kind. Over this century, religious culture of England was completely transformed. In words of Christopher Hill:

‘In 1603 all English men and women were deemed to be members of the state Church, dissent from which was a punishable offence. Heretics were still burnt at the stake, just as suspected traitors were tortured. By 1714 Protestant dissent was legally tolerated: the Church could no longer burn, the state no longer tortured. Church courts, powerful in all spheres of life since the Middle Ages, lost almost all their functions in this century. Under Charles I Archbishop Laud ruled the country; under Anne it caused a sensation when, for the last time, a Bishop was appointed to government office’ [Hill 1980: 3]

The prevailing doctrine and practices of the Anglican Church were challenged by the Puritans who were deeply influenced by Calvinism, particularly its doctrine of individual predestination. Puritanism aimed at purifying the Church of England from the remaining Catholic influences. They laid enormous emphasis on individual's own comprehension of the scriptures, spiritual devotion, discipline and sacrifice. Puritanism called for an administrative revolution in the working of the English Church by completely severing its relationship with the state. It demanded the abolition of the post of Bishops, their removal from the House of Lords, and the abolition of Deans and Chapters and Church Courts. Puritanism preached integrity of the individual, service to the community, and spiritual equality of all. They repudiated the elaborate church hierarchy and rituals, and believed that honest study of Bible and integrity of individual's conscience were the most important ways to implement God's will. They also emphasised on hard productive work in one's own occupation for the welfare of the broader community. Moreover, they called for the abolition of tradition of holidays on saints' days so that more time was available for people to pursue their productive work.

In the 1570s, several Puritans pushed for separation from the Church of England and established their independent congregations in many places. Repression was launched against them and they migrated to the Netherlands in 1582. Some of their leaders, such as Robert Browne (ca. 1550-1633) and Robert Harrison (ca. 1545-1585) believed that instead of being hereditary, the true church should be a voluntary community of believers who followed God's commandments, upheld high moral values, and believed in brotherhood.

However, the majority of the Puritans still remained inside the Church of England trying to reform it from within. Yet, they were described as 'non-conformists' because they did not follow certain accepted practices of the Church. There were also the radicals within them who eschewed the established churches altogether and organized 'gathered churches' for the believers who were supposed to be chosen. Fragmentation frequently occurred with more and more radical sects being formed with lesser number of adherents. Most of them tried to maintain distance from the temporal authorities. The mid-seventeenth century provided them opportunity as the state seemed to be disintegrating giving these sects a lot of freedom of operation. The growth of Puritan sects during the English Civil War (1642-51) was enormous.

On the whole, Puritanism can be described as a movement of reform and renewal within the state church in England. The Puritans more rigorously believed in 'Biblical piety' and a return to the original Christianity. They also more sharply distinguished themselves from Catholicism than the adherents of the state church. In fact, they did not even regard Catholicism as a religion but as a form of priestly despotism. Puritanism has also been regarded by Max Weber and others as believing in a special occupational ethic with strong emphasis on manual work and ascetic and thrifty life which generated a 'spirit of capitalism'.

There developed another dissenting sect among the English. John Smyth (1555-1612) formed an independent congregation in 1606 which asserted its separatism from the established churches. After repression, the members of this sect shifted to the Netherlands in 1608. They were the Baptists who believed in voluntary baptism and they formally declared themselves as such in 1609 in Amsterdam. The theological principles of the Baptism were subversive of the state church of England. Moreover, if people were free to choose their own church, the payment of compulsory tithe to the state church (which was 10 per cent of income) was completely illogical. So, the Baptists as well as others rejected the demand for tithe and during the Civil War many of them refused to pay.

Now the principle of productive work and the priesthood of all believers were extended to the clergy in the state church, particularly during the 1640s. It was argued that the clergy should subsist not on compulsory tithes but on voluntary contribution of the believers. If this was not enough the priests should do productive manual work like others. Many sects believed that the priests should be elected by the congregation and should be paid by voluntary contributions. Some of them denied the very need for a separate class of priests and claimed that even layman could preach. They favoured tolerance for all radical protestant sects.

Another important religious movement, in terms of the number of followers, was Quakerism. It was founded by George Fox (1624-1691) who was an itinerant preacher and who had earlier come under the influence of Baptism. He covered

the whole of England several times in the course of his preaching during which he was imprisoned many times and even attacked by the hostile mobs. He was quite successful in uniting a large number of individuals in North England who were not satisfied with existing churches. Quakers' main influence in the early phase was among the agricultural population many of whom had fought against the landlords during the Civil War. Thus, besides being a radical religious movement, Quakerism was also a movement of political and social protests. From the mid-1650s, the Quaker movement spread in other part of England and it soon surpassed the Baptists in terms of the number of followers.

So far as their ideology was concerned, the Quakers were in line with many other radical sects existing at that time. They condemned the clergy of the established churches, rejected the conventional churches as meeting places for true Christians, and firmly believed in the doctrine of inner light which meant that the pure and the holy persons could directly receive the inspiration from God. They also believed that the true believers had the possibility of becoming Christ-like by the true inner divine inspiration.

The Quakers eschewed the conventional forms of symbolism and behaviour current in the English society of the day. They refused to take off their hats to anyone, rejected the usual names for days and months, and refused to swear oaths. The fear of the Quakers to establish the rule of the pious through violent means was a factor in motivating the leading classes to bring about the restoration of the monarchy.

Another group, the 'Levellers', emerged as one of the most radical groups demanding equality based on natural rights. They declared that reason was the fountainhead of all demands of justice. Later, another group emerged under the leadership of Gerrard Winstanley calling itself as 'true levellers'. Later, its followers were termed as 'Diggers' because they believed in economic equality and engaged in the practice of digging common land. Winstanley completely rejected traditional religion and wrote against clergy with more vehemence than any other writer during the Civil War. He very strongly rooted for human freedom from bondage of all kinds. He wrote that it was the inner conscience of human beings which would free them from bondage. There was no outside God and, according to Hill, Winstanley 'came to use the word Reason in preference to God' [Hill 1975: 141].

Another sect was termed as 'Familists, members of the Family of Love'. Their leader was Henry Niclaes, born in Munster (Germany) in 1502. The Familists believed that heaven and hell were to be found in this world and that human beings could again inhabit this earth in a state of innocence that had existed before the Fall. They also believed in common property as it was nature which produced everything. They believed that God was in every man and thus all men were equal. In England, Familism was spread by Christopher Vittels and it became a significant sect during the English Civil War. However, it rapidly declined soon after the Restoration and some of its members joined the Quakers.

Many dissenting sects emerged or derived inspiration from Anabaptism. One sect named 'Pilgrim Fathers' emerged from an alliance between the Dutch and English Anabaptists. Another sect was called the 'Fifth Monarchists' who believed that rebellion against the existing regime was necessary to establish the rule of God on earth. Some of the groups such as 'Ranters' and the 'Family of Love'

considered orgies as the path towards salvation. In many cases, therefore, these radical sects displayed defiance of political and social norms. Resistance appeared in many forms. Quite often the followers of these sects refused to pay tithes to the mainstream churches. Thus, social and political radicalism often accompanied religious radicalism. The religious freedom available during the Civil War and under Cromwell was unparalleled in Europe of this period. So, many sects, particularly the Baptists and the Quakers took advantage of this and expanded their membership enormously. The Quakers were even perceived as a threat to the state in their steadfast refusal to conform to religious and social traditions, and their radical rejection of the clergy, conventional sacraments, and even the church buildings (which they pejoratively called as 'steeple houses'). The idea of the end of the world and the coming of the new world with Jesus Christ as king was quite popular among many sects.

In England, the restoration under Charles II (1630-1685) did away with the liberties and rights granted earlier to the religious non-conformists. Several laws enacted between 1661 and 1665 were instrumental in the persecution of the Puritans and many other sects. Many groups faced active social and political exclusion by the state and the parliament forcing many of their adherents to migrate to the Netherlands and other places in Europe, as well as to North America. In particular, the Quakers, who had developed enormously during the 1650s, were vigorously persecuted. In 1662, the Quaker Act was passed which discriminated against the dissenters in a comprehensive manner.

Christopher Hill summarises this period of retreat as follows:

'The great period of freedom of movement and freedom of thought was over. For 20 years men had trudged backwards and forwards across Great Britain, in the Army, in search of work, in the service of God.... Preaching tinkers returned to their villages, or like Bunyan went to gaol. Levellers, Diggers, Ranters and Fifth Monarchists disappeared, leaving hardly a trace.... Fox disciplined the Quakers: they succumbed to the protestant ethic. Property triumphed. Bishops returned to a state church, the universities and tithes survived. Women were put back into their place. The island of Great Bedlam became the island of Great Britain, God's confusion yielding place to man's order' [Hill 1975: 378-79].

The militancy and millenarianism of the revolutionary years gradually gave way to introspection among the adherents of these radical sects. The division among them, then defeat and more divisions led to the realisation that the expected God's kingdom did not belong to this world. So, after Restoration quietist and pacifist tendencies came to the fore among these sects. One revealing example were the Quakers who turned complete pacifists after an early phase of militant millenarianism. Facing persecution by the established churches and the allied governments, many sect members fled to Americas where they found more suitable atmosphere to spread their message.

The persecution faced by non-conformist sects after Restoration came to an end after the Glorious Revolution which gave rise to a spirit of tolerance. The Toleration Act of 1689 ensured, at least in theory, that freedom of religious practice was granted to the dissenters even though they continued to be excluded from holding public office and from educational institutions. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, the number of the followers of the dissenting sects stood at about six per cent of the population. In this period, there emerged a powerful religious movement known as 'Methodism'.

Methodist movement was founded by John Wesley (1703-1791). It emerged as an independent movement particularly because of Wesley's zeal of preaching. Methodism preached piety, hard work, and thrift. However, its popular appeal might also have consisted in its openness towards supernatural phenomenon like magic as well as towards religiously motivated emotionalism. Among its members the skilled workers predominated forming about half of the number. Initially, Methodism existed as a reform movement within the established church in England, but it finally was able to found its own separate church.

Since Methodism was a large mass movement, its role in preventing a radicalisation of English working classes and people in general was quite significant. The influence of the French Revolution, which was felt all over Europe, was not discernible in England due to the conservative influence wielded by Methodist preachers. In fact, historians have noted the gradual integration of the dissenters, such as the Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, Quakers, and Methodists into the conservative social and political structures in England.

Despite the repression on religious freedom unleashed during the period of Restoration, many of the radical religious ideas survived. In some form or the other, these radical sects managed sufficient following to ensure that non-conformity remained an important aspect of religious, social, and political life of England. Increasingly asserting their independence, such non-conformist sects were able to increase their membership in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries because of their flexible institutional structure and their ideology of voluntary membership and free entrepreneurship. It has been estimated that, in 1711, one out of six persons in London was a dissenter. By mid-nineteenth century, the number of people attending the non-established or 'Free Churches' stood at 20 per cent of the total population in Great Britain. It meant that the number of people adhering to the non-conformist churches was about one half of the total church-going population. In Britain, the term non-conformism slowly replaced the term dissent, and the rising middle classes showed preference towards the non-conformist sects.

3.5 RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

The Protestant Reformation was a very comprehensive phenomenon seriously influencing political, social, and intellectual situation of Europe. Thus, while in the beginning of sixteenth century, Europe generally appeared to present a uniform religious picture, by 1600 it stood as thoroughly divided not only between Catholics and Protestants, but also between various sects, each trying to assert its independence from the others. Even among the Catholics there occurred certain rethinking and change in institutional structure. Such sentiments did not remain confined to the elite but reached down to the popular levels. This gave rise to diversity in European religious culture at an unprecedented level. A large number of small and large groups existed openly professing their ideologies through oral and print mediums. Within Protestant Reformation, diversity was quite common, but even within Catholicism new forms of diversity emerged. Both Catholicism and Protestantism at the official levels tried to put down doctrinal diversity through persecution and repression in collaboration with the political authorities. Yet, religious diversity continued to flourish in many ways, finally winning by the late seventeenth century. Dissent and non-conformism in seventeenth-century

Europe was characterised by a wide network and it also witnessed a lot of pluralism and fragmentation.

There existed a lot of differences among the reformist sects resulting in some amount of friction among them. Their opposition to officially supported religions was quite obviously marked. However, there also existed a great amount of openness and tolerance in these sects about doctrinal questions than was possible for the established, state-supported orthodox religions. The atmosphere of religious toleration consciously or unconsciously created by a large variety of radical reformist sects provided the opportunity for the Enlightenment to successfully appeal for religious toleration in general, even tolerance for non-religious ideas and people.

In England, during the Civil War and soon after, according to Chirstopher Hill, 'the representatives of the New Model Army, London Levellers and radical divines, all show a degree of tolerance astonishing for the age' [Hill 1975: 364]. Some of the groups such as the Levellers had a democratic vision which contained religious tolerance as a central element. The religious radicals during this period also believed in the holy spirit existing within each individual and they emphasized on 'one's own experienced truth as against traditional truth handed down by others' [Hill 1975: 368].

A great amount of religious conflict took place in Europe resulting in huge loss of life. But, by the mid seventeenth century, it was commonly decided that tolerance was the best way of decent survival. It is also possible to find a pattern of secularisation in the strict dissociation of most of these sects from the state. They considered religion to be an individual matter which should be kept apart from the interference from the state.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss some of the important radical reformist sects in England.

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- 2) What is the contribution of the radical religious sects to European modernity?

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3.6 LET US SUM UP

European religious life was torn apart by the Protestant Reformation in early sixteenth century. This resulted in almost continuous religious conflict for more than a century at various levels. Protestantism was marked by multiple divisions and was challenged by more radical currents collectively designated as 'Radical Reformation'. These radical groups proliferated and were found all over Europe, many of its members migrating to other parts of the world, particularly to North America. The dissent and non-conformism of these radical groups continued until the late eighteenth century when, faced with Enlightenment secularisation and French revolutionary upheavals, most of them retreated to conservative positions.

However, radicalism in the religious culture of Europe signified not only challenges to religious hierarchy but also challenges to social and political hierarchies. Due to various factors, but also owing to the variety of radical religious sects, the European religious life became quite diverse and accepted tolerance as a policy by the late seventeenth century. The diversity and radicalism of these religious sects also fed into many later secular and egalitarian ideologies.

3.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 3.2
- 2) See Section 3.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 3.4
- 2) See Section 3.5