

Dissenter Protestantism and moral and social change



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Dates:

Received: 24 July 2023

Accepted: 11 Sept. 2023

Published: 29 Feb. 2024

How to cite this article:

Rasmusson, A., 2024, 'Dissenter Protestantism and moral and social change', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 45(1), a2947. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v45i1.2947>

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Dissenter Protestantism, Pietist, and revivalist movements have played a crucial but often overlooked role in the emergence and development of democracy, the abolition of slavery and the struggle for women's rights. The article focuses on the emergence of dissenter Protestantism in 17th century England, its continuation in the USA and similar movements in other parts of Europe. Drawing on theories from sociology, moral psychology and other behavioural sciences, the article argues that the social impact of dissenter Protestantism was the result of a complex combination of theology, practices, institutions and specific historical circumstances. While the theology of these movements was not unique, their emphasis on following Jesus Christ and sanctification was a significant aspect. Other factors contributing to their impact include the role of friendship and strong social networks, a relative egalitarianism, a certain distance and independence from dominant institutions and cultures and the creation of self-organised and relatively autonomous organisations. This combination of theological and social elements created free spaces that facilitated the development of new or different practices. Another crucial aspect was their ability to integrate reasoning and affective powers, uniting theory with metaphor and narrative. Finally, the specific practices and institutions within these movements allowed individuals to grow and enter into communities that shaped their lives.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article combines theological and historical analysis with theories from sociology, moral psychology and other behavioural sciences. It shows the fruitfulness of using empirical social science for theology and history.

Keywords: dissenter Protestantism; democracy; abolitionism; women's rights; feminism.

Oberlin

In the summer of 1832, John Jay Shipherd, a Presbyterian minister in Elyria, Ohio, received a visit from his former fellow student, Philo P. Stewart (the following is based on Morris [2014]). They began discussing the prospect of establishing a community and college somewhere in Ohio. Both of them were products of the great revival known as the Second Great Awakening, with Charles Finney as its most prominent leader. In 1833, the community of Oberlin was founded, and several families relocated there. The foundation of Oberlin was based on a covenant that aimed to bring both the church and the world 'under the entire influence of the blessed gospel of peace' (Covenant of the Oberlin Colony). As part of this new community, they also envisioned the creation of a college that would be open to individuals of all races and genders. They successfully persuaded Finney to join as a teacher and eventually serve as the college's president.

Oberlin played a significant role in the revivalist movement, emphasising repentance, sanctification and the moral transformation of both individuals and society. For Finney, the struggle against slavery was a natural outcome of the gospel. He believed that slavery, along with the treatment of Native Americans, was the greatest sin in the country. Finney refused to administer communion to slave owners and criticised the hypocrisy of the Declaration of Independence, which proclaimed that everyone is created equal while its authors owned slaves and displaced Native Americans. He also condemned the defence of slavery within churches and their silence on the oppression of Native Americans. Finney believed that if churches united against slavery, it would be abolished promptly (Finney 1988:Lecture 15, 2013:Lecture XXXIV:VII [Loc. 12458–12646]; Hambrick-Stowe 1996; Smith 2007).

Oberlin also became an important hub in the so-called Underground Railroad, aiding escaped slaves in their journey to Canada. In 1839, Ohio made it a crime to assist escaped slaves, and in response, Finney defended the right to civil disobedience.

Note: Special Collection: Morality in history.

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Furthermore, Oberlin was the first college to admit both men and women, and it produced several influential leaders in the women's rights movement. One notable figure was Lucy Stone, who became one of the iconic leaders of the early women's movement. Her close friend at Oberlin, Antoinette Brown, became the first woman in the United States to be formally ordained as a minister in her denomination. Lucy Stone was also a close student mentor and then lifelong friend of John Mercer Langston, an African-American student who went on to become a lawyer, university president, ambassador and congressman. These are just a few examples from the early 1840s. Stone and Brown were often critical of the conservatism they encountered at Oberlin and they pushed and broke boundaries, but it was Oberlin that gave them the opportunity (McMillen 2014).

The revival movements created many other similar colleges, often drawing inspiration from Oberlin, and frequently by former Oberlin students. Many former Oberlin students, both white and black people, went on to build educational systems for former slaves in the southern states after slavery was abolished. Others became missionaries, particularly women. In 1888, John Langalibalele Dube, a South African student, began studying at Oberlin. Dube later co-founded the African National Congress (ANC) and became its first president¹ (Hughes 2011).

A hidden history

This story of Oberlin illustrates the role of churches and congregations in moral formation, as well as the often overlooked contributions of dissenting Protestantism and revivalism in shaping the modern world. While traditional narratives often focus on the Enlightenment and the French Revolution or the Protestant Reformation (Rendtorff 1970), and are challenged by Catholic counter-narratives (Gregory 2012), Oberlin represents an alternative narrative that can be woven together with these other stories. However, because of its distance from political and cultural powers and the limited control dissenting Protestantism has had over leading educational institutions, much of this history has been neglected or marginalised. But Oberlin is just one example of a broader historical trend that has been unfolding for centuries. In the following sections, I will briefly explore this history, focusing on three moral and social revolutions: the emergence of democracy, the abolition of slavery and women's rights. I will then present a theoretical framework that may help explain this history.

Dissenter Protestantism, revivalism and social and political change

I will begin in 17th century England with the emergence of Dissenting Protestantism or Nonconformism (Bradstock 2010; eds. Larsen & Noll 2017–2020). These groups challenged

1. Much of the early leadership of the ANC stemmed from this kind of background. To mention just two of the most famous examples: Albert Luthuli, the ANC's leader from 1952 to 1967 and recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1960, was also a devout Congregationalist (Couper 2010). Nelson Mandela, a Methodist, was very active in youth work and shaped by mission schools (Cruywagen 2016).

the idea of compulsory national or politically established churches and sought to establish self-governing congregations of followers of Jesus Christ. They emphasised God's action in human life, the following of Jesus Christ and sanctification and separation from the world. While sharing theological similarities with Luther and Calvin, they also drew from medieval Catholic traditions.

One of the crucial factors here is the relationship with political power. In 17th century England, the churches could be roughly divided into four groups: Anglicans; Presbyterians who wanted to replace the Anglican state church with a Presbyterian state church; Separatists, Baptists, Quakers and others who sought self-governing churches separate from the state; and finally Independents (the forerunners of the Congregationalists) who held a position between Presbyterians and Separatists. Eventually, Presbyterians also became part of the non-conformist movement because of losing the power struggle. Shipperd and Finney were Presbyterians, although in a later and very different American context. The so-called New Divinity Presbyterians in America, influenced by Methodism, became important in the reform movements.

One of the pioneers of Baptism in England, Thomas Helwys, wrote a book in 1612 advocating for religious freedom, which he believed should extend to all Christians (Protestants and Catholics), as well as to Jews and Muslims (Helwys 2009:155–310). He was imprisoned almost immediately and died in prison four years later. He had many followers. In fact, almost everyone who at this time advocates for and writes about freedom of religion and freedom of speech tends to come from this type of Christian background (Wilken 2019).

This includes several influential women. We know of about 300 female preachers in England during the years 1640–1660 (ed. Freeman 2011:17). Katherine Chidley, one such example, published *The Justification of the Independent Churches of Christ* in 1641, arguing for church independence, freedom of conscience and religion and the idea that local church members should elect their own leaders. Notably, this was the first such argument published by a woman in English (Chidley 2011).

This is the background to philosopher John Locke's less radical but more well-known defence of freedom of thought and religion (Wilken 2019:169–179). In the American colonies, Baptists and Quakers also led the struggle for general religious freedom, and they went on to play a key role in getting religious freedom enshrined in the US Constitution.

Baptists, Independents and Quakers formed strong communities characterised by intense religious practices and developed alternative institutions. Their internal democratic practices, such as the principle of 'one person, one vote', sometimes including women, served as a model for political reform movements such as the Levellers, who advocated for

universal male suffrage, equality under the law and freedom of conscience in 17th century England. The Levellers had much of their social base in Baptist congregations. Chidley, who was part of the Leveller movement, also argued for women's participation in the political process (Gillespie 2004:ch. 2; Rees 2016).

In Germany, there were Moravians and various Pietist movements that shared similarities with English Dissenting Protestantism in terms of congregational structure, piety patterns and practices, although they were usually less radical in relation to the political authorities. Women often played significant roles in these movements (Olson & Collins Winn 2015; Shantz 2013). However, there is a significant difference: political oppression on the continent was more severe, making it more difficult to create independent congregations. Historians have long debated why England and the United States, on one hand, and Germany, on the other, developed so differently. While there are, of course, many reasons for this, German historian Hartmut Lehmann has suggested that one contributing factor was that the Pietist movements were not given the opportunity to form independent congregations and movements. Consequently, a broad popular civil society developed much later in Germany (Lehmann 2010).

It was the same types of churches that played a substantial role in the struggle against slave trade and slavery in England and America, especially Quakers, but also Methodists and other dissident and revivalist Protestants, including revivalist Anglicans, were influential (Brown 2006; Dayton & Strong 2014; Fogel 1989). The economic historian and Nobel Laureate Robert Fogel (1989) has asked about the role of the Quakers:

How could the policies initially embraced by so small and isolated a sect, one that was initially widely despised and severely persecuted by the Anglican majority, become so influential that these policies became embedded in a new orthodoxy and became a central feature of the prevailing political ethos? (p. 208)

Their impact was linked not only to their theological convictions about equality before God and in the church, but also to their emphasis on a common holy life, a strong group identity and robust domestic and international organisations and networks (Carey 2012). Together with other dissenting Protestants, particularly Methodists, they created the first modern social movement. However, this began with the internal practice of the church. This history is very complex and ambiguous, and I do not have the space to develop it here. Later on, Oberlin became a prominent part of this history.

The emergence of the modern women's movement can be traced back to similar circles, with roots dating back to Baptist and especially Quaker influences in 17th century England. The background included a more egalitarian and independent ecclesiology, theologies about spiritual equality and the experience and conviction that the Spirit of God was working through women. This not only led to a re-interpretation of

the Bible but it also created a new public space for women. Chidley is just one example. Of course, there was considerable resistance both outside and inside these churches. In 1666, the Quaker Margaret Fell published the book *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed of by the Scriptures* (Fell 2018). The Methodists, with direct support from John Wesley, also accepted female preachers. However, after Wesley's death, the English Methodists prohibited women from preaching in 1802 (Chilcote 1991). A remarkable example is Dorothy Ripley, an English Methodist who was active both in Britain and the United States as an itinerant revivalist preacher. She opposed slavery, often worked with black churches, started schools for former slaves and authored five books. In 1802, she invited herself to the White House to meet with President Thomas Jefferson. She criticised him for owning slaves, for arguing that black people did not possess the same intellectual abilities as white people, and for his views on women and education for women. In 1806, she preached in the Capitol building in Washington with Jefferson in attendance, becoming the first woman to do so (Everson 2007; Ripley 1810, 1822).

No movement gave women a larger role than the Quakers over time. Margaret Hope Bacon (1986) writes that in the 1840s two centuries of Quaker practice had shaped Quaker women:

The experience Quaker women had accumulated in public speaking, holding meetings, taking minutes, and writing epistles prepared them for leadership roles when the time was ripe for a women's right movement to emerge. (p. 2)

The two maybe most famous public women of the 1830s in America were the sisters Sarah and Angelina Grimké. They came from a very wealthy and influential slave-owning family in Charleston, South Carolina. The family was Anglican. But first Sarah and then Angelina converted to Presbyterianism and then after a few years they became Quakers. They were among the first women to speak to mixed-gender groups outside the context of church meetings. They began as anti-slavery agitators, but soon started lecturing and also writing about women's rights. Gerda Lerner writes that Sarah Grimké's feminism, grounded in her Christian faith and reading of the Bible, developed the sex and gender distinction as early as the 1830s, discussed the intersection of gender, class and race, developed social theories about the causes of male power dominance, stressed the importance of feminist consciousness and pioneered feminist political activism (Grimké & Lerner 1998:40). Later more famous feminists such as Lucretia Mott, Elisabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy Stone were all strongly influenced by her. In 1838, Angelina Grimké became the first woman in USA to address a legislative body, when she gave two speeches to an overfilled Hall of Representatives in the Massachusetts State House in Boston, on the issue of slavery and on the role of women in politics (Grimké & Grimké 2014; Grimké & Lerner 1998; Lerner 2004).

In 1848, five women planned a conference that took place in a Methodist Church in Seneca Falls in which a Declaration of

Women's rights were written. It is, in traditional narratives, seen as the beginning of the women's rights movement. Four of these five were Quakers; the fifth had been converted in a revival meeting with Charles Finney (Bacon 1986:1).

But more important than these individuals were the social movements that made the struggle for women's rights possible and which consisted to a large extent of women formed in congregations. Particularly important was the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, led for a long time by Methodist Frances Willard. Her parents studied in Oberlin, and she therefore lived there as a child (Evans 2022:18–21). The World's Woman's Christian Temperance Union was the main organisation working for women's suffrage in New Zealand, the first country in the world to introduce women's suffrage in 1893 (MacDonald 2009) and in Finland, first in Europe 1906 (Sulkunen 2009). It was also important in several other countries, including Sweden (Bengtsson 2011). They used the social and moral capital they had acquired in the churches to the struggle for suffrage and women's further rights.

This is an extremely complex, contradictory and multifaceted story. There are, of course, many other social, economic and political factors and actors involved. Dissenting Protestantism is both shaped by and interacts with these other factors and actors. The more religion becomes an established and integrated factor in a society, the more it interacts with factors such as nationalism, ethnicity, politics and social class. Dissenting Protestantism and revival movements could also work against democracy, abolitionism and women's rights. They often changed when they became more embedded in the surrounding society. For example, as Baptists and Methodists in America grew and searched for respectability, they increasingly accepted segregation also in their own churches, which in reaction led to the creation of independent black denominations. And as white Methodists and Baptists gradually migrated to the southern states, they soon also came to accept slavery. Both Methodists and Baptists split on the slavery issue. After the Civil War, the white southern denominations became strong defenders of segregation and white supremacy (Wilson 1980). The same can be said in relation to women's rights. Resistance to women as preachers and leaders was strong, and it also grew in churches that once pioneered such practices when these churches became more established and respectable.

But my argument is not that these kinds of dissenting churches and revival movements and denominations automatically supported, for example, the struggle against slavery. But it is still the case that opposition to slavery and support for women's rights mainly came from minorities within dissenting Protestantism and revival movements. They neither, for example, came from the Anglican Church in the United States (the Episcopal Church) nor from the American Catholic Church. Both broadly supported slavery and resisted women's rights. In Europe, established national churches did not pioneer democracy or women's rights. Nor did opposition against slavery in USA emerge primarily from

more Enlightenment-oriented circles, which were politically far more powerful than the revivalist movements or the Quakers. Harvard University, for example, played little part in the resistance to slavery. Harvard was then as now the most prestigious university in the USA, more shaped by Enlightenment thinking and well-integrated into the social elite. At the time Oberlin was created, Harvard had long been dominated by Unitarians and other Enlightenment currents. Children of southern plantations often studied there and Harvard often received funding from slave owners (Harvard University. Presidential Committee on Harvard and the Legacy of Slavery 2022). Harvard did not create a movement or new institutions, as did the schools dominated by the revivalists, such as Oberlin, Yale and Wheaton. Harvard was also much later in admitting both African-American students and women.

Moreover, it is no coincidence that the largest black churches in USA are Methodist and Baptist. Many of the black leaders, both men and women, came from just this kind of Christian background. Richard Allen, the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and Jarena Lee, an influential preacher in the same church, are two renowned and influential figures. They pioneered theologies, practices and institutions that would, in the long run, reshape not only the USA but also the world. Why this background and not some other? The civil rights movement in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s had its primary social base precisely in black Baptist and Methodist churches and was only conceivable in terms of the long-time role of the black churches (Chappell 2004; Dickerson 2020; Gates 2021; Newman 2008).

If I have had more space I could also show how traces of this history turn up in social science studies. I have reviewed various areas ranging from studies on democracy, economic development, social trust and corruption to studies on female education and gender-based violence. But presenting this requires a separate article. I provide some examples in Rasmusson (2021).

On the influence of dissenting Protestantism: Theoretical perspectives

What conclusions can we draw from the story I have told and how can we explain it? Why has the kind of dissenting Protestantism and revivalism that I have described had such a significant relative influence despite its limited size and relative distance from the majority culture and political and cultural power? My answer is that it is a complex combination of theology, practices and institutions together with specific historical circumstances. One must also distinguish analytically between 'everyday moral practice' (such as degrees of trust and generosity), 'extraordinary everyday moral practice' (such as the Oberlin community or religious orders) and 'work for radical change in moral, social and political structures' (such as the struggle against slavery). Everyday generosity, albeit distorted, can exist within a

community alongside acceptance of or blindness to major and often structural injustices and oppression. Similarly, movements working for social justice in one area can be blind to injustices in other areas. History is full of such examples, both within and outside the churches. The American women's movement, for example, split on the race issue.

The traditions I have described have no unique theology. The practices they develop are also rooted in earlier traditions. Similar to all other human action, these actions are based on common human processes, practices and institutions. However, the movements in question have developed specific combinations of theology, practices and institutions that, in certain circumstances, have been of great importance. The roles these movements have played are, as I have repeatedly said, not unambiguous. A particular constellation of theology and practices may have different consequences in different areas and circumstances. The beliefs, practices and institutions that I will describe here can, in certain contexts, also corrupt and deform people and communities and lead to destructiveness and evil. There are many examples of this in Dissenter Protestantism and revivalism as well.

A theological characteristic of these traditions is the emphasis on following Jesus and sanctification. Such an emphasis naturally leads to varying degrees of disruption and disassociation from surrounding cultures and social practices. Theologies of sanctification are therefore interrelated with ecclesiology. Churches that are largely embedded in the majority culture tend to emphasise that morality is based on natural law or built into the demands of created life, of everyday life. The emphasis is more on forgiveness than on sanctification. There is a sceptical attitude regarding the possibility of moral transformation. The more radical demands of a Christian ethic are either addressed to particular groups, such as the monastic orders, or are seen as demands of the law that awaken insight into one's own sin, as in some forms of Lutheranism. But for Anabaptists, Baptists, Quakers, Pietists, Moravians, Methodists and others, sanctification was central, which also made them much criticised by outsiders. The search for individual and social holiness and the creation of separate congregations were two sides of the same thing. This search for holiness did not only lead to stronger separation from the wider society but also to heightened work for social reform. It was precisely this dissenting practice that made the historical role concerning democracy, slavery and women's rights I have described possible. The radicalisation of Quaker abolitionism was, for example, closely connected to a holiness revival and reformation among both British and American Quakers (Brown 2006:413–419).

These traditions were and are therefore often criticised for asserting an individualistic or sectarian Christianity in relation to churches embedded in the dominant social or cultural life of a culture or nation. But they also create strong communities. Many social science studies show that friendships and communities play a very important role in shaping the morality of individuals and communities. And

no community seems, according to these studies, to have as great a shaping role as religious communities. Political scientists Putnam and Campbell (2010) write:

Having close friends at church, discussing religion frequently with your family and friends, and taking part in small groups at church are extremely powerful predictors of the entire range of generosity, good neighborliness, and civic engagement. (p. 472)

No other type of organisation or factor (including gender, age, education, political views and income) comes close. Individual religious beliefs do not have this effect, nor does worship attendance as an individual act (Haidt 2012:285–318; Lewis, Macgregor & Putnam 2013; Miller 2018:229–241; Putnam & Campbell 2010:443–493).

Richard Sosis (2000) has compared the longevity of 200 religious and secular (mostly socialist) communities in the 19th century USA. He sees it as a kind of natural experiment on the ability to deal with the problem of collective action. The religious communities survived on average four times longer than the secular ones. And this was after he had removed the most successful religious communities, the Hutterites, from the study. Through increased devotion, loyalty and trust in community members, 'religious groups are able to avoid or minimise costly monitoring and punishment systems that are otherwise necessary to overcome the free-rider problem that typically plagues communal enterprises' (Sosis 2000:72). The traditions I describe more rarely created the type of communities studied by Sosis, but it is these same mechanisms that are behind the strength of their churches.

If friendships and tight social networks are one factor, the relative distance these communities create from dominant culture and social and political structures is another. Social change often comes from creative minorities (Sunstein 2019). The very position of a minority helps to create the free spaces needed to imagine and practice new possibilities, without being constantly seen and controlled by dominant elites and groups (Calhoun-Brown 2000; Polletta & Kretschmer 2022). It is therefore no coincidence that it was in these types of churches that women were sometimes able to take leadership roles and speak in public. Another prominent example is the role of black churches in USA as free and creative spaces.

Related to this is the fact that these traditions created self-organised and self-governing organisations and often international networks. It is in self-governed assemblies that democratic practices and habits begin to develop. It is also the beginning of the creation of an independent civil society. For the surrounding society, it is precisely the strong internal community and relative autonomy of the religious communities that is seen as threatening (Bradstock 2010; Smith 2007; Woodberry 2012; Woodberry & Shah 2004). 'Free spaces' that are not controlled by society are seen as dangerous. And it can easily lead to very closed communities. At the same time, these 'free spaces' are a prerequisite for social change. The social order was threatened, as happened in 17th century England, when Baptists and Quakers demanded the right to organise themselves or when the Grimké sisters made public

speeches against slavery in mixed-gender groups. Here we find a tension between being so closed off from the surrounding society that one cannot influence it and being so embedded in society that one cannot challenge it. The history of the Quakers is a good example of this tension.

A further significant factor is the relative egalitarianism or 'mild hierarchy' (Christakis 2019) based on Christian beliefs about spiritual equality that often characterises these movements, especially in their early stages. 'Mild hierarchy' can easily lead to fragmentation and individualisation. But it also enabled the development of democratic practices and a greater role for women, 'lay people' or African-Americans and other minorities. But it requires good structures and leadership. Again, Quaker and Methodist history provide instructive example of this.

A further factor contributing to the strong formative power of religious communities is their ability to unite reasoning and affective systems, cognition and emotion, theory with metaphor and narrative (Haidt & Kesebir 2010; Railton 2014; Smith 2013 & Smith 2015). We know that moral knowledge by itself has little action-motivating effect (Schwitzgebel & Rust 2014). It is not just about being able to reason well, it is also about being motivated to act, and that requires emotions and thinking to work together. And we are much more motivated by examples, stories and friends than by moral theories. Examples, stories and metaphors speak to the whole person, not just to abstract thinking. In her book *Exemplarist Moral Theory*, where she incorporates insights from neuroscience, cognitive science and moral psychology, philosopher Linda Zagzebski has developed an entire moral theory based on the emotion of admiration. Good people are those we admire after critical reflection, and we learn what to do from those we admire. Admiration has both cognitive and affective aspects, and therefore it has a much stronger motivational effect than theoretical moral reasoning. Several moral psychology experiments support this theory (Algoe & Haidt 2009; Miller 2015:77–101; Zagzebski 2017).

A final factor I will address is the role of structures, institutions and practices. Moral training is about growing into, learning and being able to critically use historically developed social practices, traditions and narratives and sometimes creating new ones. Following these practices creates habits, a kind of behavioural autopilot, living without being constantly guided by one's thinking. This is also what makes change so difficult. The way we live, think and see the world is built into everyday practice (Smith 2010:317–383).

It was very difficult in a slave society to see the reprehensibility of it. It was naturalised. For slave owners, Christian practices such as daily personal prayer could be incorporated into daily life with slaves and legitimise their own actions (Winner 2018). It was also very difficult to break with these practices. The price was high. The Grimké sisters had to leave South Carolina. One might compare with how difficult it is for us to deal with climate change both on individual and collective levels, because institutions and practices are in place and are not easy to change.

But practices and traditions are also resources. People living in Oberlin were able to enter into a network of institutions and practices that shaped their lives. Black and white people could study, live and eat together. The mere fact of sitting at the same table at dinner was a revolution for many, changing one's feelings and attitudes in a way that a purely theoretical knowledge of the equality of all did not (cf. Thaler & Sunstein 2009).

Again, we can see how all these factors are interconnected: theology, dense communities, free spaces, leadership structures, the interplay between reasoning and affect, the role of examples and stories and how we live through institutions and practices. Hence, the importance of ecclesiology.

This is true in general, but we have seen it develop in particular ways in the traditions I have described. With the result, as sociologist Robert Woodberry says, that things such as democracy, freedom of religion and expression, women's rights and the abolition of slavery 'was not the inevitable result of economic development, urbanisation, industrialisation, secularisation, or the Enlightenment, but a far more contingent process profoundly shaped by activist religion' (Woodberry 2012:270).

Instead of a conclusion

It is difficult to fit the history I have described into unambiguous theological and ecclesiological templates and models. However, many theologians and church leaders are critical of the movements I have described, of their theology, ecclesiology and practice. But on the issues I have discussed, most church traditions now affirm what these movements, or minorities within them, once pioneered, even if this affirmation came after initial and often prolonged resistance. At the same time, the ecclesial practices that helped create this new reality have often, and not infrequently for understandable reasons, continued to be criticised. However, as formerly socially established churches have increasingly lost their established role, elements of the congregational practice once developed by dissenting Protestants and Pietists have become more attractive, while the latter movements, including in their search for respectability, have evolved in the direction of the traditionally dominant churches.

Acknowledgements

This is an edited and much shortened version of an article written in Swedish (used with permission) (Rasmusson 2020). Some of the research on which this text is based was conducted during a 5-month research stay in 2019 at the Stellenbosch Institute of Advanced Study in South Africa.

Competing interests

The author declared that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

A.R. is the sole contributor for this article.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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