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MONTANISM AND ITS MODERN  
REPRESENTATIVES.

**M**ONTANISM was one of those eccentric forms of Christianity which have appeared from time to time in the history of the Christian Church. It combined all the ascetic, rigoristic, and chiliastic elements of the ante-Nicene age. In Montanism these asserted a claim to universal validity, which the Catholic Church felt compelled, for her own interest, to reject, leaving the effort after extraordinary holiness to a comparatively small circle of ascetics and priests, and seeking rather to lighten Christianity for the great mass of its professors than add to its weight. Montanism was not originally a departure from the faith, but a morbid overstraining of the practical morality and discipline of the early Church. It was an excessive supernaturalism and puritanism in opposition to Gnostic rationalism and Catholic laxity. It is the first example of an earnest and well-meaning, but gloomy and fanatical hyper-Christianity, which, like all hyper-spiritualism, is apt to end in the flesh.

Montanism originated in Asia Minor, the theatre of many movements of the Church in this period; yet not in Ephesus or any large city, but in some insignificant villages of the province of Phrygia, once the home of a sensuously mystic and dreamy nature-religion, where Paul and his pupils had planted congregations at Colossæ and Hierapolis. The movement was started about the middle of the second century, during the reign of Antoninus Pius or Marcus Aurelius, by a certain Montanus. According to hostile accounts, before his conversion he was a mutilated priest of Cybele, with no special talents or culture, but burning with fanatical zeal. He fell into somnambulist ecstasies, and considered himself the inspired organ of the promised Paraclete or Advocate, the Helper and Comforter in these last times of distress. His adversaries wrongly inferred, from the use of the first person for the Holy Spirit in his oracles, that he made himself directly the Paraclete, or, according to Epiphanius, even God the Father. Connected with him were two prophetesses, Priscilla and Maximilla, who left their

husbands. During the bloody persecutions under the Antonines, which raged in Asia Minor, and caused the death of Polycarp (155), the three went forth as prophets and reformers of the Christian life, and proclaimed the near approach of the age of the Holy Spirit and of the millennial reign, in Pepuza, a small village of Phrygia, upon which the new Jerusalem was to come down. Scenes took place similar to those under the preaching of the first Quakers, and glossolalia and prophesying in the Irvingite congregations. The frantic movement soon far exceeded the intention of its authors, spread to Rome and North Africa, and threw the whole Church into commotion. It gave rise to the first Synods which are mentioned after the apostolic age.

The followers of Montanus were called Montanists, also Phrygians, Cataphrygians (from the province of their origin), Pepuziani, Priscillianists (from Priscilla, not to be confounded with the Priscillianists of the fourth century). They called themselves *spiritual* Christians (*πνευματικοί*), in distinction from the psychic or carnal Christians (*ψυχικοί*).

The bishops and Synods of Asia Minor, though not with one voice, declared the new prophecy the work of demons, applied exorcism, and cut off the Montanists from the fellowship of the Church. All agreed that it was supernatural (a natural interpretation of such psychological phenomena being then unknown), and the only alternative was to ascribe it either to God or to His great Adversary. Prejudice and malice invented against Montanus and the two female prophets slanderous charges of immorality, madness, and suicide, which were readily believed. Epiphanius and John of Damascus tell the absurd story, that the sacrifice of an infant was a part of the mystic worship of the Montanists, and that they made bread with the blood of murdered infants.

Among their literary opponents in the East are mentioned Claudius Appolinarius of Hierapolis, Miltiades, Appollonius, Serapion of Antioch, and Clement of Alexandria.

The Roman Church, during the episcopate of Eleutherus (177-190), or of Victor (190-202), after some vacillation, set itself likewise against the new prophets at the instigation of the presbyter Caius and the confessor Praxeas from Asia, who, as Tertullian sarcastically says, did a two-fold service to the devil at Rome by driving away prophecy and bringing in heresy (Patripassianism); or by putting to flight the Holy Spirit and crucifying God the Father. Yet the opposition of Hippolytus to Zephyrinus and Callistus, as well as the later Novatian schism, show that the disciplinary rigorism of Montanism found energetic advocates in Rome till after the middle of the third century.

The Gallic Christians, then severely tried by persecution, took a conciliatory posture, and sympathised at least with the moral earnestness, the enthusiasm for martyrdom, and the chiliastic hopes of the Montanists. They sent their presbyter (afterwards bishop) Trenæus to Eleutherus in Rome to intercede in their behalf. This mission seems

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to have induced him or his successor to issue letters of peace, but they were soon afterwards recalled. This sealed the fate of the party.

In North Africa the Montanists met with extensive sympathy, as the Punic national character leans naturally towards gloomy and rigorous acerbity. Two of the most distinguished female martyrs, Perpetua and Felicitas, were addicted to them, and died a heroic death at Carthage, in the persecution of Septimius Severus (203).

Their greatest conquest was the gifted and fiery, but eccentric and rigoristic Tertullian. He became, in the year 201 or 202, from ascetic sympathies, a most energetic and influential advocate of Montanism, and helped its dark feeling towards a twilight of philosophy, without, however, formally receding from the Catholic Church, whose doctrines he continued to defend against the heretics. At all events, he was not excommunicated, and his orthodox writings were always highly esteemed. He is the only theologian of this schismatic movement, which started in purely practical questions; and we derive the best of our knowledge of it from his works. Through him, too, its principles reacted in many respects on the Catholic Church; and that not only in North Africa, but also in Spain, as we may see from the harsh decrees of the Council of Elvira in 306. It is singular that Cyprian, who, with all his High Church tendencies and abhorrence of schism, was a daily reader of Tertullian, makes no allusion to Montanism. Augustine relates that Tertullian left the Montanists, and founded a new sect, which was, through his (Augustine's) agency, reconciled to the Catholic congregation of Carthage.

As a separate sect, the Montanist or Tertullianists, as they were also called in Africa, run down into the sixth century. At the time of Epiphanius, the sect had many adherents in Phrygia, Galatia, Cappadocia, Cilicia, and in Constantinople. The successors of Constantine, down to Justinian (530), repeatedly enacted laws against them. Synodical legislation about the validity of Montanist baptism is inconsistent.

Passing on to analyse the character and tenets of Montanism, we note:—

I. Its *Doctrine*. Montanism agreed in all essential points with the Catholic Church, and held very firmly to the traditional rule of faith. Tertullian was thoroughly orthodox, according to the standard of his age. It is true, he opposed infant baptism, on the assumption that mortal sins could not be forgiven after baptism; but infant baptism was not yet a catholic dogma, and was left to the discretion of parents. He contributed to the development of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, by asserting against Patripassianism a personal distinction in God, and the import of the Holy Spirit. Montanism was rooted neither, like Ebionism, in Judaism, nor, like Gnosticism, in heathenism, but in Christianity; and its errors consist in a morbid exaggeration of Christian ideas and demands. Tertullian says, that the administration of the Paraclete consists only in the reform of dis-

cipline, in deeper understanding of the Scriptures, and in effort after higher perfection; that it has the same faith, the same God, the same Christ, and the same sacraments with the Catholics. The sect combated the Gnostic heresy with all decision, of which system it forms the exact counterpart, placing Christianity chiefly in practical life instead of theoretical speculation, and looking for the consummation of the kingdom of God on this earth, though not till the millennium, instead of transferring it into an abstract ideal world. Yet, between these two systems, as always between opposite extremes, there were also points of contact: a common antagonism, for example, to the present order of the world, and the distinction of a pneumatic and a psychical Church.

Tertullian conceived religion as a process of development, which he illustrates by the analogy of organic growth in nature. He distinguishes in this process four stages:—(1) Natural religion, or the innate idea of God; (2) the legal religion of the Old Testament; (3) the Gospel during the earthly life of Christ; and (4) the revelation of the Paraclete; that is, the spiritual religion of the Montanists, who accordingly called themselves the *pneumatics*, or spiritual Church, in distinction from the psychical (or *carnal*) Catholic Church. This is the first instance of a theory of development which assumes an advance beyond the New Testament and the Christianity of the apostles; misapplying the parables of the mustard-seed and the leaven, and Paul's doctrine of the growth of the Church *in* Christ (but not *beyond* Christ). Tertullian, however, was by no means rationalistic in his view. On the contrary, he demanded for all new revelations the closest agreement with the traditional faith of the Church, the *regula fidei* which, in a genuine Montanistic work, he terms "*immobilis et irreformabilis.*" Nevertheless, he gave the revelations of the Phrygian prophets on matters of practice an importance which interfered with the sufficiency of the Scriptures.

II. In the region of *Practical Life and Discipline*, the Montanistic movement and its expectation of the near approach of the end of the world came into conflict with the reigning Catholicism; and this conflict, consistently carried out, could not but show itself to some extent in the province of doctrine. Every schismatic tendency is apt to become in its progress more or less heretical.

1. Montanism, in the first place, sought a forced continuance of the *miraculous gifts* of the Apostolic Church, which gradually disappeared as Christianity became settled in humanity, and its supernatural principle was naturalised on earth. It asserted, above all, the continuance of *prophecy*; and hence it went generally under the name of the *nova prophetia*. It appealed to Scriptural examples—John, Agabus, Judas, and Silas; and for their female prophets, to Miriam and Deborah, and especially to the four daughters of Philip, who were buried in Hierapolis, the capital of Phrygia. Ecstatic oracular utterances were

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mistaken for Divine inspirations. Tertullian calls the mental status of these prophets an "*amentia*," an "*excidere sensu*," and describes it in a way which irresistibly reminds one of the phenomena of magnetic clairvoyance. Montanus compares a man in the ecstasy to a musical instrument, on which the Holy Spirit plays His melodies. "Behold," says he in one of his oracles, "in the name of the Paraclete, the man is a lyre, and I sweep over him as a plectrum. The man sleeps ; I wake. Behold, it is the Lord who puts the hearts of men out of themselves, and who gives hearts to men." As to its matter, the Montanistic prophecy related to the approaching heavy judgments of God, the persecutions, the millennium, fasting, and other ascetic exercises, which were to be enforced as laws of the Church.

The Catholic Church did not deny, in theory, the continuance of prophecy and the other miraculous gifts, but was disposed to derive the Montanistic revelations from Satanic inspirations, and mistrusted them all the more for their proceeding not from the regular clergy, but in great part from unauthorised laymen and fanatical women.

2. This brings us to another feature of the Montanistic movement—the assertion of the *universal priesthood* of Christians, even of females, against the clerical aristocracy, which from the time of Ignatius had more and more monopolised all ministerial privileges and functions. The Montanists found the true qualification and appointment for the office of teacher in direct endowment by the Spirit of God, in distinction from outward ordination and episcopal succession. They everywhere proposed the supernatural element and the free motion of the Spirit against the mechanism of a fixed ecclesiastical order.

Here was the point where they necessarily assumed a schismatic character, and arrayed against themselves the episcopal hierarchy. But they only brought another kind of aristocracy into the place of the condemned distinction of clergy and laity. They claimed for their prophets what they denied to the Catholic bishops. They put a great gulf between the true spiritual Christians and the merely psychical ; and this induced spiritual pride and false pietism. Their affinity with the Protestant idea of the universal priesthood is more apparent than real ; they go on altogether different principles.

3. Another of the essential and prominent traits of Montanism was a visionary *Millenarianism*, founded indeed on the Apocalypse and on the apostolic expectation of the speedy return of Christ, but giving extravagant weight and a materialistic colouring. The Montanists were the warmest millenarians in the ancient Church, and held fast to the speedy return of Christ in glory, all the more as this hope began to give way to the feeling of a long settlement of the Church on earth, and to a corresponding zeal for a compact, solid episcopal organisation. In praying, "Thy kingdom come," they prayed for the end of the world. They lived under a vivid impression of the great final catastrophe, and looked therefore with contempt upon the present order

of things, and directed all their desires to the second advent of Christ. Maxmilla says : " After me there is no more prophecy, but only the end of the world."

The failure of these predictions weakened, of course, all the other pretensions of the system. But, on the other hand, the abatement of faith in the near approach of the Lord was certainly accompanied in the Catholic Church with an increase of worldliness. The millenarianism of the Montanists has reappeared again and again in widely differing forms.

4. Finally, the Montanistic sect was characterised by fanatical severity in *Asceticism* and *Church Discipline*. It raised a zealous protest against the growing looseness of the Catholic penitential discipline, which in Rome particularly, under Zephyrinus and Callistus, to the great grief of earnest minds, established a scheme of indulgence for the grossest sins, and began, long before Constantine, to obscure the line between the Church and the world. Tertullian makes the restoration of a rigorous discipline the chief office of the new prophecy.

But Montanism certainly went to the opposite extreme, and fell from evangelical freedom into Jewish legalism ; while the Catholic Church in rejecting the new laws and burdens defended the cause of freedom. Montanism turned with horror from all the enjoyments of life, and held even art to be incompatible with Christian soberness and humility. It forbade women all ornamental clothing, and required virgins to be veiled. It courted the blood-baptism of martyrdom, and condemned concealment or flight in persecution as a denial of Christ. It multiplied fasts and other ascetic exercises, and carried them to the extreme severity, as the best preparation for the millennium. It prohibited second marriage as adultery, for laity as well as clergy, and inclined even to regard a single marriage as a mere concession on the part of God to the sensuous infirmity of man. It taught the impossibility of a second repentance, and refused to restore the lapsed to the fellowship of the Church. Tertullian held all mortal sins (of which he numbers seven), if committed after baptism, to be unpardonable, at least in this world ; and a Church which showed such lenity towards gross offenders as the Roman Church at that time did, according to the corroborating testimony of Hippolytus, he called worse than a " den of thieves," even a "*spelunca machorum et fornicatorum.*"

The Catholic Church, indeed, opened the door likewise to excessive ascetic rigor, but only as an exception to her rule ; while the Montanists pressed their rigoristic demands as binding upon all. Such universal asceticism was simply impracticable in a world like the present, and the sect itself necessarily dwindled away. But the religious earnestness which animated it, its prophecies and visions, its millenarianism, and the fanatical extremes into which it ran, have since reappeared, under various names and forms, and in new combinations,—in Novatianism, Donatism, the spiritualism of the Franciscans, Ana-

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baptism, the Camisard enthusiasm, Puritanism, Quakerism, Quietism, Pietism, Second Adventism, Irvingism, and so on, by way of protest and wholesome reaction against various evils in the Church.

Renan compares Montanism with Mormonism. But this is most unjust to Montanism, which was a thoroughly honest and earnest movement, free from polygamy and all worldly aims. A far better and more worthy parallel is furnished by Irvingism. Both are thoroughly orthodox in all the articles of ecumenical faith; both excel in strict discipline; both agree in claiming and exercising the spiritual gifts of the apostolic age; both proclaim the near approach of the advent of Christ; both are solemn warnings against the corruptions and dangers of the ruling Church. But Montanism was democratic, and asserted the general priesthood of the laity, including women; while Irvingism is a thoroughly aristocratic organisation, with a complete hierarchy of apostles, prophets, evangelists, angels, bishops, priests, and deacons, and has a high liturgical and ritualistic form of worship. Both start from historic pessimism, and pass away like shining meteors, while the historic Church, notwithstanding all corruptions and obstructions, is marching on with the promise that the gates of Hades shall never prevail against it. Irvingism still lives, but its prophetic voices are silent; the speaking in tongues has ceased, its apostles are nearly all dead, and their places remain vacant. And as to the Second Advent, it is steadily approaching indeed, but "the times and the seasons" the Father concealed even from His own Son in the days of His humiliation, and "has put in His own power."

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## OUR LORD'S METHOD OF DEALING WITH DIFFERENT CLASSES.

**T**HE point which we are to discuss here, in connection with our Lord's ministry is one of great practical importance. For the great object of the Christian ministry is to deal with all classes of men, in order to bring them into the kingdom of God, and to transform their character once they are there. Our labour is vain if we fail to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, and to carry them on from stage to stage in the life of faith and holiness. How did our blessed Master go about this work? Did He use the same method with all sorts and conditions of men? If not, how and on what principles did He vary His method? These questions will afford us materials for very interesting and profitable practical study.

The first and most memorable thing to be noted in connection with