FROM JERUSALEM TO ROME TO WITTENBERG TO LONDON, AND BACK: A CHURCH HISTORY

The Reformation, which began 500 years ago in Germany, changed the course of history. The way you think is influenced by this event, even if you are not aware of it. You might have noticed that northern European people view the world a little differently from southern European people; the Reformation is partly why. It began in 1517 when a monk called Martin Luther sent an open letter containing 95 assertions about theology and the church to his archbishop, seeking discussion. His statements painted a different picture from how the Catholic church acted and understood itself at that time. Luther also claimed that his statements followed from the Bible, which the church claimed to follow. The resulting controversy echoed across Europe as the Catholic church expelled Luther, and his followers became the protestant movement.

The Reformation is best understood today not as a split between Catholic and protestant but between free and institutional churches, the latter linked with the civil authorities and enforcing an ecclesiastical monopoly through them whenever possible. Luther used scripture to correct theological errors, but his idea of church was institutional. Only free churches go back to the New Testament, rather than to the institutional church peculiar to the late Roman Empire. Free churches have been persecuted by institutional protestant churches as ruthlessly as by Catholicism.

After Luther this history pays attention to England, from which protestant Christianity spread farthest. But church history began at Jerusalem, and it will end there, too.

Undaunted by persecution, the Christian faith spreads beyond Judea through the Roman Empire, but becomes intellectualised

The church began among Jews. The first church was Jewish, and the first Christians were persecuted by the Jewish authorities, just as Jesus had been. *Acts of the Apostles* tells us this, and how the church went into the wider Near East, where the culture had been Greek since the conquests of Alexander 'the Great' of Macedon 400 years earlier. We have many writings in Greek of the 'church fathers', Christians of the generations after the Jews who had known Jesus in the flesh and (mostly) wrote the New Testament. Whereas Jewish Christians were steeped in the Old Testament, the church fathers were steeped in Greek philosophy. They defended the faith against Gnosticism, the New Age movement of the time, which was seeping into the church and polluting it, much as New Age thought does today. But their Greek worldview, unlike the Hebraic, often saw God as remote from the world. Christian philosophers used human reason to study how Jesus was both God and man. That is futile, because we need first to know what unfallen man and what God are like. As the clearest view of those things comes from Christ himself, any attempt to disentangle them within him uses circular logic. Jesus Christ's followers understood that he and the Creator had identical personalities and power in which their divinity consisted; this is all that is necessary to grasp. Knowing Christ makes a Christian, not knowing about him.

At this time the eastern Mediterranean was part of the Roman Empire. The Romans conquered all lands around the Mediterranean Sea, including Western Europe and much of Britain. They took up Greek culture after conquering Greece, a century before they reached the Holy Land, and they spread it round Europe. Our sport, our theatre (whence film and TV drama), our democracy and much civic architecture all derive from ancient Greece. Christianity too spread throughout the Roman Empire, aided by the absence of war (the *pax Romana*) and the good road system; it also spread east into Asia. In the empire, Christianity spread underground, because the Roman authorities often persecuted it. Christians were accused of treason against the emperor, who claimed to be a god as well as a ruler. No other ultimate lord who might stir up dissent could be allowed. Christians also refused to join in honouring Rome's pagan gods, and were seen as not public-spirited and were held responsible when Rome fared badly, supposedly the gods' vengeful response. Christianity emphasises personal morality, and telling people they are sinners who must repent is also not popular. Many early Christians died for Christ, as He had died for them. Only Christians die with love for their killers; this combination is uniquely attractive, causing the church to grow even as believers are killed.

In the 4th century Christianity becomes the State religion of the Roman Empire, diluting the church; Western Europe falls into a Dark Age

In AD312 everything changed. Shortly after the worst persecution yet – clearly a result of the empire's decline – a general called Constantine had a vision which he took to be Christian, prior to a battle that he won outside Rome for control of the western half of the Empire. The Empire had recently divided itself administratively, after a crisis of governance in a decadent era, into a western Latin-speaking half and an eastern Greek-speaking half. Constantine advocated this new religion which had spread through the Empire. He soon won the eastern half of the Empire as well.

To society's good, the Roman Empire's laws were softened. Dinner parties with pre-paid prostitutes (*i.e.* orgies) became socially unacceptable, the exposing of unwanted newborns dwindled, and lethal gladiatorial games died out. But what of the church, the bride of Christ? Having suffered rape by the world, the church now let itself be seduced by it and committed adultery with it. Churchmen saw Christianity becoming the approved religion of the Empire, with philosophers and magistrates on side, as winning the world for Christ. Instead, worldly thinking polluted a church that grew fashionable, class-ridden and wealthy. The apostolic church had been a grassroots network that met in private homes for prayer, praise, preaching and Communion, but instead of several *episkopoi* (overseers, the word translated as 'bishop') per congregation,[1] there came to be only one – who also oversaw congregations founded nearby from his town. (The Apostles had targeted towns.) This hierarchy offered a target to Satan, who used to his oldest trick, temptation, to corrupt the church from within. The church's hierarchy was drawn from the aristocratic classes. Aristocrats and slaves are sinners who will be judged by identical criteria, but the power of this radical equality to transform society was neutralised. Slaves got a weekly day of rest,

[1] In the New Testament, a congregation's council of male *episkopoi* were also its *presbyteroi*, elders, denoting their seniority (Acts 20:17-28). The council was instituted by the *apostolos* who founded the congregation, when he moved on to preach elsewhere.

but no abolitionist campaign matched Christ's words, *Do as you would be done by*. The bishop claimed the unique authority over a congregation of its founding *apostolos*, handing it on in an 'apostolic succession' which asserted on its own authority that it was the only legitimate church heedless of deviation from scripture. At its apex was the Bishop of Rome, claiming succession from the leading apostle, St Peter. This system was the opposite of Jesus' words, "*the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant*" (Matthew 20:25ff). Peter had said that all believers were priests (1 Peter 2:9), with Jesus as High Priest (Hebrews 4:14), but ordination 'to the priesthood' grew to separate an officer class who dispensed the sacraments to the rest. The bishop of Rome styled himself High Priest (*pontifex maximus*) and Father (papa, or Pope) of believers. The people ceased to participate as in 1 Corinthians 14:26 and became spectators of liturgy similar to Imperial court ceremonial, in dedicated church buildings matching Roman public edifices and often containing statues of Christ. (Statues are to remind the living of the dead, but Jesus is alive.) The supernatural was sought in the sacraments. Liturgy had a good purpose (teaching in an era of popular illiteracy) and a bad once (hiding the absence of the Holy Spirit). On many church walls were written the Ten Commandments, although Jesus prioritised different laws of Moses: love God and neighbour. Loyalty owed to Jesus went to the church. The church stopped looking like Jesus and became an instrument of social control.

Constantine's victory was in AD312, Christianity became 'established' as the only religion approved in the Roman Empire in AD381, and execution (rather than expulsion) for heresy began in AD385 when a man called Priscillian was put to death. In one lifetime, dissent *from* Christianity became treason, and persecuted became persecutors. Babies were baptised without repentance, making Christianity a default faith rather than an opt-in one; this is the original meaning of *catholic* (wide).

The Donatists were Christians who objected to church leadership by overseers who had apostatised or even betrayed their flocks to the authorities during persecution just before Constantine, but who then appealed to the authorities in order to regain their leadership positions (hardly a sign of repentance). The Donatists were crushed, a bad decision. Promoted by Constantine, a series of church councils began. Followers of Arius, who saw Christ as a high being but not divine in the sense of the Creator (like Jehovah's Witnesses today), were declared non-Christian and put out of the churches. That was a good decision, for the Arian view was growing and polluting the church. A later council declared that Nestorians, Trinitarians who dissented merely over *how* Jesus was fully divine and fully human, were not Christians, a tragic decision. The Nestorian church which flourished for a thousand years in Asia, beyond the Roman Empire and latterly under Islam, was written out of church histories.[2] Such is the cost of breaking *sola scriptura*. It came about by combining the Nestorian view of Jesus' mother with logical tricks about the paradox that Jesus was both divine and human.

In the fifth century, Roman governance broke down in the Western part of the Empire as waves of Germanic peoples, mainly Arian, crashed into Western Europe from the east. Rome itself was sacked in 410AD; its soldiers quit Britain at that time, and Angles and Saxons took sail to colonise the island. Across Western Europe towns

[2] See Philip Jenkins' book, *The Lost History of Christianity* (2014).

were depleted, trade dwindled, the land reverted to subsistence farming, and literacy faded. That Rome and much of its empire lapsed into semi-barbarism soon after Christianity became its religion of State clearly indicates divine displeasure; being the church means that God has dealings with you, not necessarily that he is pleased with you (see the critical letters in Revelation 2&3, and 1 Peter 4:17).[3] Some believers gathered into monasteries. It is unclear whether they were reacting to corruption in the world or in the church, for the two had become blurred. Monasteries managed to keep learning alive, although believers are meant to engage with the world, not withdraw from it. Gregory 'the Great', the first monk to be Pope, furthered a change from confidence in Satan's defeat at the Cross to a dualistic view in which demons toss believers about haplessly and protection lay in the church's sacraments. This superstitious view would lead, centuries later, to savage and grotesque witch-hunts.

The hierarchy of the church promoted expansion by persuading a ruler of the advantages of declaring himself Christian (perhaps in furtherance of his alliances), and having him declare Christianity the only faith recognised in his lands. The idea of a Christian country emerged, although God's only national covenant has been with Israel. The parish system grew, with a bishop in each town, in a socio-legal system in which the biblical system of many congregations per *episkopos* was inverted (by what authority?) Totalitarian Christian theocracies have been no better for their peoples than non-Christian regimes, and have fought each other for the usual reasons of exploitation, jealousy and tribal hatred. That is because politicised churches produce conformity more than piety, since they are not rooted in personal repentance. Gospel faith means being changed in ways you cannot do for yourself, so as to keep God's laws of morality. It is a personal process which Christ works in his committed, and it cannot be replicated by political or social means. Politicised churches include many committed believers in Christ, but politicised Christianity is a religion of works, a Trinitarian Judaism. That is because politics is about law whereas the gospel is about grace. Grace is backed by love, and cannot come by social or legal pressure.

No Dark Age fell on the eastern half of the now institutionally Christian empire. This half was based on Constantinople (also known as Byzantium, today Istanbul), named after Constantine. John Chrysostom's sermons berated Jews as Christ-killers, even though Christ and his disciples were Jewish; Jews began huddling into ghettos for safety. Jewish believers in Jesus would instantly have understood Jesus' claims to divinity and never let Arianism grow in the church. Greek-speaking churches were also polluted more than in the West by monophysites, who neglected Christ's humanness. The Byzantine Empire faced a new challenge when Islam exploded out of Arabia in the seventh century, claiming to correct Old and New Testaments, denying the divinity and atoning death of Christ, and demanding the forcible conversion of reluctant pagans and the subjugation of Christians and Jews. Islamic armies overran the Holy Land but were blocked from Eastern Europe at Byzantium. They conquered Egypt, where the church was divided over how Christ was both human and divine. Muslim armies then pushed across North Africa, replacing Graeco-Roman culture by Arabic, and crossed into Spain at Gibraltar. From Spain they entered France but, after a defeat in AD732, they retreated back over the Pyrenees. Muslims would dominate the western Mediterranean for centuries.

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[3] This simple explanation was missed by the influential theologian Augustine of Hippo in his work *The City of God*, which wrestled with the question: Why did God let Rome crumble after it had moved to Christianity from paganism?

Western Europe emerges from the Dark Age as a Catholic civilisation with an absolutist papacy at its apex

In the 11th century Western Europe emerged from its Dark Age as a Catholic civilisation. A partnership was forged between the papacy and the overall leader of the many Germanic kingdoms. The first of these high kings was Charlemagne in 800AD, Christian not Arian, and the man who began the enforcement of tithes (taxes going to the church) in his realm. His title grew over the centuries – confusingly – to 'Holy Roman Emperor'. But papal arrogance led to tension in the partnership, for the Pope claimed authority to tell Western Europe's Catholic monarchs what to do politically as well as spiritually, and to deprive them of influence in the choice of bishops in their realms. One Pope, facing a French monarch who sought to tax the church, asserted (in the 1302 decree or 'bull' *Unam Sanctam*) that "it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff".

There had long been tension between the Greek-speaking churches of the eastern half of the Roman Empire, centred on Byzantium (Constantinople), and the Latin church centred on Rome. The east had suffered no Dark Age and the head of State in Byzantium styled himself Emperor in direct succession to the Roman Emperors. Byzantium was affronted at papal recognition of alternative 'Holy Roman' emperors. During the Dark Age, the papacy had been a plaything of Rome's corrupt aristocracy; now it demanded authority over Byzantium. In 1054 Rome insisted on a change to the Creed about the Trinity. This led to mutual excommunication. The Catholic (meaning 'broad') church split into the Latin-speaking Roman Catholic church and, in the east, the Orthodox churches. The Roman Catholic church was international, claiming universal authority by divine right. The Orthodox churches ran along national lines: the Greek Orthodox church, Russian Orthodox church and so on, in communion.

In 1071 the Byzantine Empire lost a battle to a Muslim people moving west from central Asia, the Turks. (They later occupied modern Turkey and gave it their name.) Byzantium swallowed its pride over the church schism and called to Western Europe for help. The Pope turned the call into a war cry to take back from Islam the land that Christ had trod. The papacy hoped also to dominate the Orthodox churches. So began the Crusades, a series of military campaigns. In their fore were the Normans (Northmen), former Vikings who had invaded northern France and picked up Catholicism. The gospels gave no license for holy war, for Jesus said his kingdom is not of this world and renounced arms on its behalf (John 18:36). Militarily speaking, the Crusades were merely a response to protracted Islamic belligerence against Europe. Crusaders bloodthirstily captured Jerusalem in 1099, but the city was back in Islamic hands less than a century later. Then in 1204, Crusaders loyal to Rome sacked Byzantium after their treaties with it unravelled. Amid such disunity, Islam regained all territory it had lost within 100 years. After recovering from the brief rampage of Genghis Khan's Mongol armies across Asia, it began to press Byzantium harder.

The Normans also invaded England in 1066. Had they been inspired by the Exodus and by Mosaic Law, they might have enacted land laws that gave all folk an equal share; but William the Conqueror simply parcelled England out to his knights as their expected reward for victory. The feudal system was a mutual dependence between

fighting knights, who were meant to defend the land, and agricultural workers who worked it to provide food. They were linked by a web of rights and obligations, but the knights had the means to coerce the rest. They were the aristocracy, taxing the peasants who worked the land. Knights saw war as high-risk sport in which to win honour under their prideful code of chivalry. Although all were Catholic, they often fought wars within Europe, bringing misery and poverty to the people.

In Western Europe the 13th century scholar Thomas Aquinas wrote a blueprint for Catholic thought and society. Churchmen were the people best educated about the Graceo-Roman past, and Aquinas effectively grafted the New Testament onto Graeco-Roman culture rather than onto the Old Testament. He mingled scripture with the Greek philosopher Aristotle, Athens with Jerusalem, a Greek rational head with a Judaeo-Christian heart. Aquinas argued for the execution of heretics, since heresy is contagious and might doom people to hell. Better would be to teach them scripture, but literate men were discouraged from reading out a simultaneous translation of the Latin Bible to the people in local languages. (They might ask awkward questions.)

For Western Europe, this era was the 'high middle ages'. The great cathedrals were built, and are still impressive today in the skyscraper age. Then in the mid-14th century nearly half the people in every town died in a few weeks as bubonic plague swept across Europe, the 'Black Death'. Depopulation lightened the oppression of those who worked the land. A peasants' uprising in England called for a single bishop in the nation and for church land to be given to the poor, but was brutally put down.

The Renaissance era: cultural greatness and spiritual corruption; dissenters

Spreading from Italy, a movement began to regain the splendour of ancient Rome, the Renaissance (meaning 'rebirth'). The city and the Italian peninsula filled with fine buildings styled on those of classical Greece and Rome. Artists and sculptors such as Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci decorated them. Mathematics began to outrun the ancient Greek achievement, and microscopes and telescopes were invented; science stirred. Universities grew out of monasteries. A thousand years after Imperial Rome, the city – and Western Europe – achieved cultural greatness afresh.

Politically, Western Europe's monarchs had grown stronger. The clash between a French king and a Pope that had elicited the *Unam Sanctam* decree also displaced the papacy to Avignon for a lifetime. After that there were rival Popes in Avignon and Rome for several decades, each demanding tithes. A unified papacy was restored to Rome after more than a century in 1417, when a senior Germanic ruler banged heads together. But papal corruption continued. Popes might pass off their illegitimate sons as nephews and make them Cardinals (hence 'nepotism', from the Italian for nephew). The papacy was a player in wars among the Italian city-states. It was routinely bought by bribing cardinals for their votes. These men should have heeded the Old Testament warning in Ecclesiastes against nominal belief, written by a man of power and wealth who knew of God but had neglected him, and was miserable. Many Catholic priests lived far from their parishes while harvesting their tithes, and church positions were bought and sold (simony). By this time priests were required, unbiblically, not to marry. Celibacy scandals were frequent, as in Catholicism today in different form.

Doctrinally, the Catholic church had invented a place called Purgatory where deceased persons destined ultimately for heaven supposedly had to work off their sins first. The Catholic church encouraged prayer for those in Purgatory, and encouraged the wealthy to leave endowments to increasingly parasitic monasteries for prayer for their souls. To encourage the poor to give, the church allowed preachers to suggest that leaving money to it would reduce the time that a loved one spent in Purgatory before entering heaven; and also to suggest that donations to the church would remit sins of one's own – past and future – if the Pope said so ('indulgences'). So now you could plan to sin and prepay against it, and even buy your salvation – for which Jesus had already paid with his blood. Rome's preachers, who knew the Bible in Latin, should have trembled at the warning of James (3:1) that Christian teachers would be judged more strictly. Faith is the only currency that God accepts against our sin.

But God has his witnesses. In Renaissance Italy a monk called Savonarola spoke out against corruption and vanity. He was excommunicated and burnt. John Wycliffe, an Oxford scholar, began a dissenting movement that grew in 15th century England, the Lollards. They attended Catholic services but avoided unscriptural practice and met discreetly for prayer and Bible study; Wycliffe oversaw an English translation. His body was dug up and burnt. The Waldenses were a similar grouping around the Alps. The Inquisition, run largely by monks, exposed such groups, even using torture to get confessions.[4] Hoping to stop the pain, people gave absurd tales such as witches flying to meetings on broomsticks. Some who confessed were handed to the authorities for burning. The hierarchy were by now like the Jewish religious authorities who condemned Jesus. Not many persons were burnt, but fear of the Inquisition was as universal as dread of any secret police. In scripture the church is contrasted with the world, meaning the prevailing culture from which it is called out, which persecutes it. Of the Lollards and Catholicism, which was church, and which the world?

Martin Luther launches the Reformation

Into this morass was born Martin Luther, in a Germanic state in 1483. He became a monk. Luther had an acute sense of his sinfulness before God, but he found no peace in confessing for hours, intensive fasting, going on pilgrimages, addressing prayers to Mary in *de facto* worship, kneeling before consecrated Communion bread or venerating bones and other relics of men whom the church had declared holy. (More than one church claimed to house Christ's circumcised foreskin.) Luther, as a monk, studied the Bible, and he had a superior, Staupitz, who guided him sensitively. Finally he found peace in Jesus Christ, having trod the path of St Paul, who reached the liberating truth that a man needed only faith in Christ to be forgiven – not struggling harder to keep the laws of Moses (Paul) or doing more penitential practices (Luther). Both men had to unlearn what they had been taught, which is hard because we invest ourselves in what we have learnt. Still Luther believed that, however corrupt the church in Germany might be, Rome itself must be pure. During the papacy of Julius II, who had led military campaigns while Pope, Luther was sent from Wittenberg, where he taught theology, to Rome on monastic business. He was shocked to find the city more worldly, more corrupt. Then a preacher named Tetzel passed near

[4] To say such actions are inspired by the Holy Spirit is blasphemous. With his words, "*These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me*" (Matthew 15:8), Jesus rebuked those who considered themselves the most devout in Israel, whom he also called children of the devil (John 8:44).

Wittenberg soliciting money for Masses and prayers to get loved ones out of Purgatory to heaven. Luther, disgusted, objected in a letter making 95 assertions ('theses') to his Archbishop in Mainz, who had let Tetzel preach there; some of the money raised would pay off a loan the Archbishop had taken, some go to rebuild St Peter's – the building in Rome today. Luther dated his letter the day before All Saints' Day, which is November 1st and the day before All Souls' Day, in 1517. Probably he also nailed his theses to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg as a challenge to debate; that was standard practice, and church doors acted as noticeboards. On All Saints' Day crowds used that door to venerate the many saints' relics collected inside, and on All Souls' Day Catholics remember the dead, many supposedly in Purgatory.

The 'twelve conclusions' of the Lollards had been posted on the doors of England's Parliament and St Paul's Cathedral 122 years earlier, but nobody of Luther's stature stood behind them; by then Wycliffe was dead. Nor was printing with moveable metal type then known in Europe, for Gutenberg devised it in Mainz a few decades before Luther. It was the internet of its day, as any literate man could read out Luther's pungent tracts to a crowd of peasants resentful of taxes to maintain church privilege.

Catholicism could not ignore Luther's critique as it did his contemporary Erasmus's, because of the threat to church income. Luther's case went up the church hierarchy. In 1520 came down a papal decree, *Exsurge Domine*, that Luther must recant in 60 days or be excommunicated for heresy, and perhaps burnt. Luther feared God more than man, and he followed Christ in challenging a corrupt religious system. The next year, at the city of Worms on the Rhine, Luther stood before Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. Charles was, at 21, the world's most powerful man: ruler of the German princes, and also of Spain and its growing Empire in the Americas, where the Catholic church was spreading. Luther, pressed to say if he would retract, ended with historic words:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason – for I do not trust in the Pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves – I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted, and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.

Later accounts include the words, "Here I stand. I can do no other." Luther got away, and was protected by a sympathetic local ruler while he continued his writings.[5] He translated the Bible from its original languages into German and he wrote against the church's 'scholastic' theology, which involved much Greek philosophy. The tangling of theology and philosophy would cause, a century later, the persecution of Galileo.

Luther's message touched off an anarchic revolution across much of Germany. He was no social revolutionary and he supported the authorities in putting it down – showing the emptiness of Rome's appeal to Germanic princes that his 'protestant' movement was a threat to their authority. By excommunicating Luther and his followers, the Catholic church created Protestantism as a rival. Some Germanic rulers, mainly in the north, declared themselves protestant and seized church land; Rome lost the tax revenue from it. In such realms Luther was able to reform the church; hence

[5] For Luther's confrontations with the church authorities, see the chapters about him in James Wylie's *History of Protestantism* (1878). This work brings out the heroic drama of Luther's life and is online.

'the Reformation'. He denounced monasticism and married a former nun. Protestant services were held in the local language, whereas the Catholic Mass was in Latin which was not understood by most. Luther wrote hymns, allowing congregations to participate more in services. Sermons grew in importance. Protestant Europe gained a boost from the promotion of mass literacy for reading the scriptures.

Some of Luther's followers wished the church to be limited to committed believers living obviously purer lives, as in the New Testament. But Luther, under pressure, stuck with the Constantinian model of a State church with a monopoly on Christian belief. Protestant rulers might enforce protestantism in their land, just as Catholic rulers enforced Catholicism in theirs ('*cuius regio, eius religio*', meaning in Latin 'whose realm, his religion'). Conflict over religion broke out between them, ending in stalemate in 1555. Protestantism survived because Catholic powers were also fighting each other (Charles V and France) and were fighting an Islamic drive; the Turks had ended the Byzantine Empire in 1453 by taking Constantinople, and by 1529 their westward drive reached the gates of Vienna after overrunning Hungary. European Christianity split into protestant and Catholic (broadly north-south, apart from Ireland) but remained politicised, leading to wider conflicts in which religion supplemented the usual reasons for war. Last and worst was the Thirty Years War; *cuius regio, eius religio* broke down due mainly to Catholic intransigence, and wider powers were drawn in. The protestant regimes of Denmark and Sweden entered on behalf of the protestant States and against the Habsburg dynasty of the Holy Roman Emperor, which also ruled Spain and Austria. Spain was already battling to keep control of the Low Countries, and it fought on behalf of Catholic Germanic States and the Emperor. Then France, although Catholic-ruled, joined in against the Habsburgs, who confronted it on two borders. By 1648 Germanic lands had been devastated.

The Reformation threw up another hugely influential protestant theologian in John Calvin of Geneva.[6] Calvin preferred the 'presbyterian' system of church governance by a hierarchy of councils instead of the episcopal system with bishops. His *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is a protestant classic, although there is relatively little on the Holy Spirit in it and churches in the Calvinist tradition are often rather dry.

The English Reformation, I: Henry VIII and his offspring

In Germanic lands the Reformation began as a religious movement and then became political. In England it was the other way round. Change was imposed by King Henry VIII in the 1530s when Rome would not let him dump his queen, who had lost her fertility, for a younger woman when he needed a male heir. Henry dumped his wife *and* Rome (which had just let his sister do what he wished to, but Henry's wife was an aunt of the Holy Roman Emperor). Henry declared himself supreme governor of the church in England in place of the Pope, and his 'Church of England' predictably ratified his desires. To raise money, he dissolved England's monasteries and sold off their assets and endowed land – to persons of influence, making the change irreversible. Many monks had lived off rental income in buildings among the finest in the land. This act changed English society, for better-educated folk now remained in the community, marrying and passing their learning to their families. Schools thrived.

[6] Confusingly, the phrase 'reformed theology' refers to Calvin specifically, not Luther.

Henry's theology was otherwise Catholic. To his death, English protestants were burnt. He authorised the Bible to be read in English in church, although William Tyndale was hounded to death for his unofficial translation. When Henry died in 1547 his young son, with advisors chosen by Henry who obviously could not be Catholics, brought in protestant theology. Catholic churches were riots of colour and art, some great, much gaudy; most was smashed to stop people addressing prayer to the dead, whom it portrayed. A similar controversy had once riven Byzantine Christianity.

Henry's son died after six years, and Henry's daughter Mary by his first wife, Catholic like her mother, became England's queen in 1553. Catholic plotters were let out of jail and protestant ones thrown in it. Protestants in London met in secret. Then Mary died after an equally short reign, and her half-sister Elizabeth became queen. She reasserted crown authority over the English church, rejecting Rome (partly for political reasons) and making church attendance compulsory. Many of England's radical protestants, the Puritans, had fled to continental protestant lands when Queen Mary acceded; under Elizabeth they returned, educated in the new doctrines and with high hopes. But Elizabeth continued the episcopal system of bishops, whereas in Scotland the church became presbyterian under the influence of John Knox. Elizabeth disempowered one Archbishop of Canterbury (Grindal) who refused to suppress public meetings of clergy to study and discuss Bible passages. Under Elizabeth, the Church of England based itself on scripture, tradition and reason;[7] the Puritans grew within it, as the literate read the Bible for themselves. Protestant encouragement of Bible study led to a grey area between family Bible studies with friends including prayer, and what was a church – especially when Bible study led to questioning of the sacramental system ministered by an ordained clergy. Some free churches were set up clandestinely, and some of their leaders were hanged for it.

The English Reformation, II: Stuart kings provoke the Civil War and the 'Glorious Revolution'

After Elizabeth died childless in 1603 the Scottish king, James, a protestant episcopalian, became king of England too. He oversaw the King James Bible, based on earlier English translations. But his Stuart dynasty did not grasp that England had more checks on royal power. His son Charles I dismissed England's parliament and ruled without it, levying new taxes without parliamentary consent. Charles and his Archbishop ran the Church of England in ways that appeared increasingly Catholic. Still there was no freedom of worship, and Puritans who wrote pamphlets in peaceable protest were flogged. Many left for America on the *Mayflower* and other ships. More went to the Netherlands, where protestants had won freedom from Spain. England was losing its best men; that the Puritans were killjoys ('puritanical') is slander by their enemies. They worked hard, drank in moderation, were honest in their dealings, and preferred simple family lives. Of all major Reformed movements they had the deepest love for the Old Testament, the better in which to ground the New.

Tensions came to a head in the 1640s. Charles recalled England's Parliament for support against rebellions in Scotland and Ireland, which his religious policies had

[7] Reason is how to mine scripture, the result becoming tradition and subject to continuing critique.

provoked. But Parliament prioritised its grievances against him, and both sides escalated until civil war broke out. Eventually Parliament set up a standing army, into which Oliver Cromwell recruited the most committed Christians suited to soldiery. By 1647 Charles had lost the war and was captive, but Parliament refused its army back pay and the army refused to disband until it had settled with its employer. Parliament was also for mandatory presbyterianism, but the army included many 'independents' who wished congregations to be self-governing, religious affairs not to be a matter for the law, and the church not to be involved corporately in politics. These radicals were inspired by Mosaic Law. They also called for restoration of common land to the poor, the vote for all men, free trade and the abolition of monopolies (which the Stuarts had created and sold, thereby raising prices). The Army leadership saw no path to these goals and, fearing anarchy, ordered radical leaders to demobilise. As debate raged, Charles slipped away to quieter captivity on the Isle of Wight. There he secretly negotiated a Scottish invasion to restore him, but the Army defeated it. After more constitutional haggling between Charles and Parliament, the Army's leaders set out their own proposals (the 'Army's Remonstrance'). Lifetimes later, these would characterise the English way of life: freedom of protestant religion, Parliament above king, regular elections. But with deadlock persisting, the Army purged Parliament of MPs who favoured agreement with the king and put Charles on trial for treason. No deal was worth anything with a man who had repeatedly broken his word and believed in his divine right to absolute power. Charles was in blatant violation of his Coronation Oath, which held him accountable to the people as well as to God; yet he had fought them to uphold his unaccountability. He was beheaded in 1649.

The Puritans now held power in England. They were the most biblically committed Christians to run a country, but they too ran into the perennial problem that gospel Christianity cannot be enacted by law, because the gospel is about grace. When the Puritans enacted more of the Mosaic laws of morality that Christ had died to help people keep, the English people did not react well. So much for England being a Christian country! (No more had Catholic Europe been, while in North America the church and the world diverged after the age of the Pilgrim Fathers, and many States allowed slavery.) Under Cromwell, England's national church did not have bishops, and protestant sects were at last free to meet outside it. Schism and squabbles over buildings and other assets are God's witness that he did not plan a hierarchical church.

Cromwell had refused the crown and there was confusion when he died in 1658. Charles' oldest son and namesake, in exile overseas, was persuaded to guarantee an amnesty to most parliamentarians and freedom of protestant religion if he was crowned, and Parliament duly invited him back (implying its authority). But a new parliament dominated by royalists restored the Church of England's monopoly and governance by bishops. In 1662 the Book of Common Prayer – still used today in some parishes – was imposed as England's only legal liturgy. Dissenting clergy had to leave their parishes: nearly one in five were gone by the end of the changes known as the Clarendon Code, aimed at 'nonconformists'. (That is how all Christians should see themselves in the world.) *Pilgrim's Progress*, the best-loved Christian book after the Bible, was written by John Bunyan while he was imprisoned under these laws.

Charles II was succeeded by his brother James II, a Catholic who promoted Rome. James had no male heir and Parliament expected to invite his daughter and her protestant husband, William of Orange, to rule upon James' death. But in 1688 James'

queen bore a son. Protestant England now faced indefinite Catholic rule, and its power brokers invited William across from Holland to lead a coup. This event, largely bloodless in Britain (not so in Ireland), was the 'Glorious Revolution'. As part of it, William and Mary accepted a Bill of Rights close to the parliamentary constitutional position from the Civil War. Protestant worship outside the Church of England was allowed and hundreds of free chapels sprang up, to the irritation of vicars in whose parishes they stood. These chapels were often led by former clergy forced out by the Clarendon Code; the unscriptural tradition of a lone pastor-teacher engaged by a council of elders dates in England to this time.[8] But a set of 'Test Acts' continued to discriminate against nonconformists, and housechurches were banned. Many nonconformists did not have their babies baptised; this preference brought persecution from State-linked churches all across Europe, as it threatened their tithing base. Nonconformists were excluded from the professions and public office, and many of them channelled their energy into entrepreneurship and innovation as pioneers of the Industrial Revolution. They also wrote many of England's finest hymns.

Many traditionalist Anglican clergy ('non-jurors') felt unable to swear allegiance to the usurpers William and Mary, and lost their positions. The Church of England had therefore emptied itself of clergy of principle, both the 'high' traditionalists and the 'low' nonconformists. Those who remained dulled their church into a torpor.

Wesley rescues 18th century England; on the Continent the Enlightenment leads to the secular French Revolution

Early in the 18th century Scotland and England, which already had the same monarch, united into one nation, with a single parliament in London. (Their national churches remained distinct.) By this time two parties had emerged, Whigs and Tories, roughly matching the parliamentarian and royalist views of the Civil War. Tensions could now be internalised in parliament and resolved without escalation to war, while the sovereign acted as a living symbol of the nation. The 'Prime Minister' was the leader of the party with a parliamentary majority; he was often drawn from the House of Lords, which had been abolished by Cromwell but reinstated with the monarchy.

In an age associated with elegance, England now hardened. The number of capital offences quadrupled after 1688, including for some acts of theft (not a capital crime in Mosaic Law) and even suspicion of poaching and subversion (in the 'Black Act' of 1723); this was the 'bloody code' of law. Hangings became public entertainment. Animals were tormented for amusement in bull-baiting, dogfighting and cock-fighting. The slave trade grew into a major transatlantic industry. Gambling and drunkenness were rife; armed robbers (highwaymen) made the roads dangerous.

The later 18th century saw improvement. This was due largely to one man, not a politician or a soldier but a clergyman, John Wesley. For decades he travelled the roads of England, preaching the word of God and organising discipleship groups for those who affirmed their wish to be saved from their sins. Wesley often had to preach

[8] Pastors and teachers are included in a list of ministries by St Paul in Ephesians 4:11, but there is no scriptural precedent for limiting these two ministries to one man who is lent the authority of the elders over the congregation. The list includes prophets, and there should be several of those (1 Corinthians 14:5,29). None of the New Testament letters is to "the pastor" of a congregation.

outdoors, for his own Anglican hierarchy was hostile to him because his preaching cut across the parish system ("the world is my parish", he said), and his discipleship groups answered partly to him even as they sat in their regular congregations. Some of Wesley's followers later became the Methodist churches, but his work lies behind the Church of England's influential evangelical wing in the 19th century. The impetus to abolish slavery, help for the poor in industrialising England, and many missionary movements are indebted to John Wesley.[9] Nonconformists made greater effort in the new industrial towns than the Church of England, whose Anglo-Catholic wing grew later in the 19th century and mirrored the pomp of the British Empire. Britain, through its empire and by mission, spread Christianity worldwide. The Moravian movement had earlier begun mission; later the USA, where no church was privileged yet Christianity had been the norm since the Puritans, led worldwide mission.

The default spirituality in our culture today is secular; most people are atheists, at least functionally. How did that happen? Freedom of religion can be abused, so that people deny God. In the 18th century the 'Enlightenment' movement arose, most influentially in France. Its emotional force came from exploitation of the poor by the rich and powerful, and from the disgrace of wars between Catholic and protestant. Its intellectual roots lay in Greek philosophy and critiques of European civilisation by indigenous people who interacted with it, while for inspiration it looked to the physical sciences and technology, which were advancing rapidly. The Enlightenment sought to develop the 'moral sciences,' a science of man based on reason. This was more about man collectively than about the individual, which is why secular society is tolerant of the private practice of any religion provided it does not impinge on the public sphere – in which secularism ardently defends itself. The Bible was viewed as a primitive expression of the moral sciences, and its supernatural elements were ridiculed as superstition. Many Enlightenment thinkers were 'Deists' who saw God as uninterested in the world, remote and therefore irrelevant. Secular society has ever since been haunted by the transcendent. Enlightened secularists suppose that wrong belief and ignorance, giving rise to poor choices, underlie society's problems. But, if ignorance is the issue, 20th century Europe had mass education systems teaching more knowledge than ever, yet still set off two terrible and fully industrialised wars. Enlightenment tradition insists that better social institutions can be designed to create a successful society, but no system run by humans is proof against corruption in the human heart. History shows how irrational faith in man is, for it is written in blood and mud: war and the exploitation of peasant labour. But when the poor got their chance in communism, bloodshed and oppression continued.

Late in the 18th century the 'Romantic' movement grew, elevating feelings and personal experience. It had elements of nature-worship that derived among educated persons from the Graeco-Roman paganism implicit in the Renaissance (obvious in its art), and among the wider population from superstitions that had never died out. The Romantic movement joined with the Enlightenment – the secular heart and head – to create a new man untouched by the gospel. When the two met, the bloodbath of the French Revolution was touched off. The military genius of Napoleon spread its ideals across continental Europe. In the code of law he imposed, the peasantry were no longer tied to their landowners. But feudalism might have withered without violence in France – as it had in England – if Louis XIV had not persecuted the Huguenots

[9] See J.W. Bready's book, *England: Before and After Wesley* (1938).

(French protestants) out of France in 1685, leaving only a Catholic church tied closely to the bloated French aristocracy and indifferent to the harsh taxation of the peasantry. Decades before the French Revolution, Voltaire, in exile from France, had been struck by the greater liberties enjoyed under English common law, even during the 'bloody code'. The Catholic church hierarchy in France should have been shamed by the warning of James (5:1-6) to the rich.

Communism, the child of the French Revolution, holds that the problem is in society (in the bourgeoisie) rather than in man, who is held to be competent to solve his own problems and can be made good by his own efforts, not divine cleansing. But in communist Russia, Stalin had hands as bloody as Hitler's. (Just as in France, if in Russia the church – Orthodox – had cared more for the poor and not been so close to the aristocracy, bloodshed might have been averted.) Mao's communism in China was bloodier even than Stalin's. These men required *de facto* worship from their peoples.

Wherever the secular view prevailed on the Continent, persecution of Jews declined. They left their ghettos and became citizens of the lands they lived in. Well educated, they made a contribution to modern civilisation beyond all proportion to their number. In England, Jews had been living openly since Cromwell's time, because the Puritans – unlike Luther late in his life – were favourable to the Jews.

Modernity to postmodernity: the present, future and the Reformation completed

The Enlightenment mingles the secular view that people are basically good but do some bad things (rather than vice-versa) with a materialist viewpoint, for it coincided with the changes brought by the Industrial Revolution. Materialism is summed up by a politician's comment 150 years ago that great matters are settled by blood and iron; mediaeval men would have given a religious explanation. The secular view of man, conjoined with materialism, is known as 'modernity.' On the continent it broke the political power of the Catholic church. A fabulously wealthy church could make no headway against materialism, and Rome will not regain power now Catholics read the Bible. To meet Luther's challenge, the Vatican had called a council at Trento in northern Italy. It tackled financial and sexual corruption in the church, but formalised doctrine. There was no room for manoeuvre because of Rome's insistence that none of its teaching was wrong. In the 19th century the Catholic church became more centralised as its edicts traversed the world in weeks by rail and steamship, then in hours by telegraph. In 1870 came the claim that the Pope speaks infallibly if ever he claims to. Weeks later the papacy, which had ruled much of Italy for centuries, was deposed as ruler of the city of Rome. It became the capital of the new Italian State.

Modernity spread throughout the industrialised world and polluted its churches. While in the Catholic world it caused a crisis of faith, in the Anglosphere (mainly Britain and the USA) protestant Christianity remained in the cultural mainstream until the 1960s. At that point secular modernity faced its own crisis in the wake of two world wars, the inability of materialism to bring personal fulfilment, and the threat of nuclear annihilation. Faith in man was shattered. Faith in God meant repentance. That left only faith in the Creation: paganism. The New Age movement took off with the 1960s hippies and a romanticised version of Indian spirituality, combined with the same gnosticism that the early church had faced. Science fiction bookshelves gave

way to sword and sorcery. The supernatural came back, but selectively. People scoff at God and miracles in the Bible yet embrace earth mysteries, spirit guides, astrology and cosmic consciousness. Modernity gave way to *post*-modernity, which holds not only that no way of finding truth is reliable but that truth itself is private ('your truth') – itself a public truth-claim! Postmodernity has undone institutional protestantism, but the gospel can always be made plausible simply by telling the Bible as a story describing actual events by which Christians live their lives. Loss of political power is good for the church as nonbelievers fall away, but postmodernity is bad for society. The idealism of the hippies was not sustainable, and the underlying pessimism soon manifested in nihilism – "nothing in life has meaning" (true, if you don't know your purpose and have nothing greater to give yourself over to). That led to hedonism – "so let's have a good time, for I have a human right to be happy". Western Europe in the 1990s faced no external threat after the Soviet collapse, was at peace, and its welfare systems offered food, a roof and medical care; yet people grew *more* discontented. The Welfare State began with good motivations, but it inadvertently promotes indolence and turns elections into auctions of unsustainable promises, in which the electorate is bribed with its own money. Meanwhile the contraceptive pill was dispensed to single women, many of whom behaved as badly as men had always done. The resulting sexual free-for-all has increased family breakdown statistics tenfold from pre-1960s figures of a few percent, which had been stable for centuries. Many children now grow up in instability and confusion. Ominously, every society to become promiscuous has quickly fallen.[10] At exactly the same time, Islam began to rise in the West on a wave of immigration. Does Islam represent impending divine judgement? Many Western intellectuals abhor Western culture today. They should be careful what they wish for. Islam has been European civilisation's most implacable opponent, and it has not changed even if Europe has.

Whether from secular political correctness or Islam, the church here is likely to face persecution by the State soon. To navigate it we must purge ourselves of cultural perspectives even as we pray and weep for our lands. Persecution is not Christ abandoning his church, but Christ purifying his bride (Rev 21). Persecution will weed out nominal believers, church liberals who compromise with the world and deny what the Bible says about sin, persons who never ponder Wesley's question "Do you desire to flee from the wrath to come?", who prioritise secular categories of religious and non-religious over Christian and non-Christian. With hierarchies gone and church buildings barred, nobody will any longer say, "I am a Catholic", "I am an Anglican", "I am a Methodist", etc. Loyalty will go direct to Christ and unity will be real. That happened in China after Mao expelled foreign missionaries of all denominations (who had inadvertently sown schism) and began a persecution that left Chinese believers with just their Bibles and the Holy Spirit. The result today is a growing network of house churches, who have the Spirit and the faith to withstand persecution. They are a small fraction of China's people, but China is 1.4 billion people – making this a huge movement of the Spirit,[11] and they are spreading the gospel beyond China. In the Islamic world, meanwhile, Muslims are converting to Christ in numbers, no longer as isolated individuals.[12] That has never happened before. Today is a glorious time to be a Christian. God's glory is always visible if you know where to look.

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[10] J.D. Unwin, *Sex and Culture*, 1934.
[11] See David Aikman's book, *Jesus in Beijing* (updated edition, 2006).
[12] See David Garrison's book, *A Wind in the House of Islam* (2014).

The Reformation that Luther began was the hinge of church history; it got the church back to the Bible, but it did not depoliticise it. Persecution will do that. We cannot blame people for disliking politicised churches, for politics is about setting the law, and the law is backed by force, not love. The church will again be a faithful mirror of Christ. To complete the Reformation, though, we must go back further still, to a church in which Jews take their place as part of the body of Christ. The church age started in Jerusalem – at Pentecost – and it will end there, with Christ's return in glory. Four hundred years after Luther sent his 95 theses to his Archbishop, the Balfour Declaration was finalised in Britain's War Cabinet during World War I. It stated that the British government "*view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object*". Behind this declaration were political motives, but also religious ones. Many of Lloyd George's War Cabinet had evangelical backgrounds, and 19th century British evangelicals were sympathetic to the Jews, a view deriving from the Puritans. The Holy Land still belongs to Abraham's descendants born through Isaac and Jacob/Israel, because of Abraham's eternal covenant with God (*e.g.*, Psalm 105:8-11); the blessings of this covenant were widened at the Cross but the original meaning was not taken away (Romans 11:28-29). The Old Testament prophecies about Israel that are not yet fulfilled require the Jews to be back in their ancient land; in particular, Isaiah (11:11-12) prophesied that "*God's hand will a second time [i.e., after the return from Babylon] recover a remnant of his people… he will… gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth*." That describes the modern State of Israel exactly.

The British backpedalled on the Balfour declaration in the 1930s, and Palestine was essentially shut to Jews as World War II neared. Europe's Jews suffered the Holocaust, a massacre due largely to resentment of their success since their emancipation. Enough of them nevertheless were living in Palestine in 1948 for the State of Israel to be reborn. The number of Jewish believers in Jesus there has risen from that point; one day they will cry to him to save Israel from mortal peril, and He will rejoin them in the flesh to rescue Israel; *they shall gaze on him whom they pierced* (Zechariah 12:10, Matthew 23:37-39). Today, the imminent fulfilment of the command to offer the gospel to all peoples; weapons of mass destruction in the hands of sinful man; and globalisation all indicate that the apocalypse is closer. From Jerusalem, Jesus will rule. Then the Reformation of the world, as well as the church, will be complete.

Further Reading on the Reformation

For a clear, deep and generous conventional exposition of the Reformation, see Nick Needham's church history, 2000 Years of Christ's Power, vol. 3: Renaissance and Reformation *(2004). 17th century outworkings are covered in volume 4. For a more radical view of the Reformation as part of the contention between institutional churches and confessional free churches, see Leonard Verduin's book* The Reformers and their Stepchildren *(1964). Verduin finds many undercover confessional movements in European history, and exposes the lovelessness of institutional churches where they comprised mainstream culture (cf John 13:35).*