

Overview of Christendom

- Did Christendom retard the development of Western Civilization or create it?
- Were the “Dark Ages” as dark as they are commonly believed to have been?
- Did science and technology develop suddenly with the “Enlightenment” or gradually across a longer period of time?
- Was the Catholic Church against scientific discovery and did it impede learning?
- Did the Reformation really create a religious revival?
- When and how did the modern nation states come into being and what was their relation to the either the Catholic church or to protestant groups that developed in the different regions
- Did people in the era of discovery really think the earth was flat?
- What role did faith honestly play in the discovery and colonization of the new world?
- Is the common presentation of history in the modern western world purposely anti-Catholic or, in a broader sense, anti-Christian?

Why Christendom Matters

- Christendom refers to the Christian period of Western history extending to the time of the Reformation and “enlightenment”
 - Our understanding of modern history is heavily influenced by our knowledge or perceptions of what came before – this is the point of departure for the modernity
 - For several centuries stretching from the “*enlightenment*” and reformation era until modern times, Christendom has been assailed by anti-religious philosophers and protestant reformers
- the Catholic Church evolved gradually from the early church prior to the Edict of Milan, and throughout its history generally represented majority opinions and interpretations
 - The Church was a vast institution and identifying antidotal examples of both good and bad is not difficult to do – we will look at broader question in the context of their time
 - The Catholic Church maintained some basic social structure after Rome gradually collapsed and was a common cultural bond well before the development of nation states when society was tribal and/or feudal
 - The Church, while lacking direct political power, was in effect a federation over what were sometimes as many as a thousand separate political units
 - The church represented three legacies; the universal church based in Rome, Greco-Roman concepts of liberty and law, and Germanic concept of honor of warriors and decentralization
 - There was a political church but there was also a pious church maintained largely through the monastery system that constrained the political church
 - The monastery system developed industries that produced and distributed products which initially created wealth for the church and some degree of industrialization

The Myth of the Dark Ages

- Tales of the “*Dark Ages*” have been repeated so many times they are accepted as true with few questions or defense
- Western history, as it’s commonly and consistently presented, consists of Classical Antiquity, followed by the Church dominated Dark Ages, which gave way to the Renaissance or Enlightenment which then led to and enabled the development of modern western society
- The phrase “*Dark Ages*” can most probably be traced to the Italian humanist Petrarch (1304-74) who characterized the period as a time of “*darkness*”
 - François-Marie Arouet, known by his nom de plume Voltaire (1694-1778): “*[during this era] barbarism, superstition, [and] ignorance covered the face of the world*”
 - Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-78): “*Europe had relapsed into the barbarism of the earliest ages. The people of this part of the world ... lived some centuries ago in a condition worse than ignorance.*”
 - Bertrand Russell (1872–1970): “*As the central authority of Rome decayed, the lands of the Western Empire began to sink into an era of barbarism during which Europe suffered a general cultural decline. The Dark Ages, as they are called ... it is not inappropriate to call these centuries dark, especially if they are set against what came before and what came after.*”
 - Daniel J. Boorstin (1914–2004), (onetime professor at the University of Chicago, librarian of Congress, and senior historian at the Smithsonian Institution): “*Christianity conquered the Roman Empire and most of Europe. Then we observe a Europe-wide phenomenon of scholarly amnesia, which afflicted the continent from AD 300 to at least 1300..(this occurred because) the leaders of orthodox Christendom built a grand barrier against the progress of knowledge.*”

Technological Advancements during the “Dark Ages”

- Europe for several centuries was plagued with wars (Vikings to the north and Moslems to the South) which limited population size and development
- Goths who conquered Rome weren't backwards but were largely “Romanized”
- Still there was consistent technical progress that improved people's lives
 - Water Ways: Monks cleared swamps creating flowing and navigable waterways
 - Water Wheels: By the ninth century one third of the estates along the Seine River around Paris had water mills and the majority were on church owned properties. Moving forward several centuries there was one mill every 70 feet along the same river.
 - Dams: Many dams were constructed during the “dark ages” and some like the one at Toulouse built in 1120 were large scale engineering accomplishments, this one spanning 1300 feet.
 - Agriculture: adoption of a three field crop rotation system, invention of the heavy plow, invention of the horse collar was also more than doubled the speed of cultivation
 - Genetics :Selective plant breeding was introduced resulting in more productive crops feeding larger populations and this innovation was a product of the monasteries
 - Invention of the chimney: Allowed for buildings and homes to be heated while being protected from the elements.
 - Eyeglasses: Developed in 1280 and went rapidly into mass production making a dramatic improvement in quality of life that extended broadly throughout society
 - Military: Heavy Calvary using high saddle with stirrups enabling use of lance, also gunpowder

Creating the “Dark Ages” Narrative

- The creators of the renaissance myth were focused principally on literature and far removed from practical reality
 - formed their positions based on the familiarity academics had of classical Greek and Roman literature and philosophy
 - the translation of these works from Greek to Latin had long since been accomplished
- The history of technology has generally been of little interest to academics in the humanity disciplines in part due to an aversion to and lack of experience with manual labor.
 - *“The scorn of men of letters for engineers throughout history has kept them, all too often, oblivious to the technology created by those engineers who were of lower social status and worked to earn their living. They had no idea that in the other world there was an uninterrupted tradition of technological writing. Leonardo da Vince is a case in point. As an engineer he was despised by the literati of his time, and they, like the majority of western intellectuals today, were ignorant of the fact that Leonardo had borrowed a great many of his inventions from technological treatises by engineers of previous generations.”* John Gimpel – Author the Medieval Machine
- The falsehoods were then enthusiastically advanced because they fit an irreligious and anti-Catholic religious and political agenda. Protestants embraced these teachings because they discredited Catholicism but, in the long run, the enemy of your enemy is frequently not your friend.

The Church and Science

- The common belief that Christianity is anti-science lacks much evidence (hard to prove a negative) but commonly points to a couple of examples
- The Flat Earth
 - For many centuries prior to Columbus, all educated Europeans, including Roman Catholic prelates, knew the world was round.
 - When the church initially opposed Columbus' voyage, it had nothing to do with the shape of the earth but the circumference.
 - Columbus had estimated that the distance from the canary Island to Japan was only 2,800 miles
 - The real distance was app. 14,000 miles which his clerical opponents correctly calculated
 - The tale about flat earth was penned by writer Washington Irving (*Legend of Sleepy Hollow*) over 300 years later and was adapted from the real story from Columbus' son's book *History of the Admiral*
 - rationale was changed to portray the Catholic Church as fearing that he would fall off the edge of the earth – portrayed as fact and integrated into academic texts
- Galileo, Copernicus, and the heliocentric solar system
 - Theories placing the sun at the center had existed for over a hundred years before Copernicus but the math was neither easier nor more accurate than the Ptolemaic system
 - The Galileo incident, which occurred shortly after the reformation, came about when Galileo was asked by the Pope to portray the heliocentric solar system as a theory
 - In *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* the Pope's position was represented by a character called "Simplicio" which wound up getting Galileo placed in house arrest
 - About a century later Johannes Kepler replaced the circular orbits with ellipses and the math now worked precisely without any forced adjustments

Nominalism

- Changes in thought leading to the reformation and enlightenment developed gradually through the latter Middle Ages
 - Nominalism developed as a competing philosophy to classical realism amongst Catholic scholastics over the concept of “universals”
- “*Realists*” saw man in the context of a divine and social construct that includes the individual along with God, the Church, culture, family (in both a narrow and broad sense), gender, and history.
 - “*reality of universalia*” reflected the classical traditions of Plato and Aristotle and were represented most prominently by Thomas Aquinas and the tradition of the Dominican monks
- The alternate view is that only individual things and beings are real is referred to as “*nominalism*”
 - associated with William of Occam who said “*entities should not be multiplied without necessity*”
 - Any sort of group identity is simply an external system of classification and tends to inhibit human progress - The nominalist’s views gradually became dominant in the west (neo-liberalism)
- Initially nominalism led to the elevation of individual rights and individual spirituality
 - However, In western thought nominalism eventually led to liberalism, neo-liberalism, and globalism that are opposed to traditional cultural identities and religion and may even reject something as basic as gender identity
 - Formed a new ideology that departed from the flow of western civilization and western thought that had to be created to form a new beginning and destroy what came before it

Devotio Moderna

- Religious movement extending from 14th to 16th century
 - amongst practicing believers' emphasis was shifting from analytical to relational and from communal worship to individual devotion and piety
 - The Sisterhood and Brotherhood for the Common Life, a group consisting of both lay people and clerics, brought these teachings to a broader audience and created followers amongst some prominent people, such as Saint Thomas Moore and Erasmus, who were educated by the Brotherhood
- The most significant literary output from this movement was by Thomas a Kempis titled *The Imitation of Christ* which is still available today
 - This book, which was written around 1400 (exact date cannot be determined) emphasized a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and came to be common in the libraries of both Catholics and Protestants
 - key points associated with Devotio Moderna can readily be seen not just in the works of Luther, but are also traceable to Calvin and Reformed Theology and ultimately to Evangelicalism
- Tended to limit the ability of reason to ascertain truth and relied heavily on revelation through scripture as the only sure way to grasp spiritual truth

The Reformation

- The ideas of the Reformation weren't generally unique
 - Previous reform movements and reformers
 - Generally based on some of Augustine's writings and minority positions
- Martin Luther was a prominent and well known personality
 - He had a platform and was especially influential in specific regions
 - Political and economic circumstances were ripe for change
 - Monarchs in Germanic areas sought revenue from Catholic church and church asset
- Indulgences and Debt
 - Always seen as controversial (a form of heresy) and abuse of church authority
 - The practice grew dramatically with the use of debt to fund purchase of political offices and building projects
 - Building projects in turn funded artisans and others whose services didn't have a high level of economic value otherwise
 - Those who are sponsored by a practice will support both the sponsor and the practice
- Did the Reformation drive Revival
 - Based on overall church participation - no. It was very low before and after
 - It may have increased the number of committed believers and activists but evidence is antidotal

Indulgences, Martin Luther, and the Fugger's

- The dominant Banking dynasty of the time was the Fugger's who had some personal connection to the Luther family
 - originally cloth merchants in Augsburg, Germany who expanded to finance leveraging their connection to upper class society
 - During the latter years of the 15th century the Fugers developed lucrative business dealings with the Hapsburgs -By the turn of the century (1600), the Fugger family controlled all of the Schwaz mining operation, owned their own silver mines in Tyrol and Carinthia, and were expanding into copper production in Hungary
- By October 1517, the reach and power of the Fugger banking family was threatening the integrity of religion and, on a broader scale, European society
 - Fee paid for offices in government and political church were funded by debt from the Fuggers
 - This drove the practice of indulgences to new levels in order to pay interest on indulgences
 - Fugger agents accompanied pardoners collecting indulgences
- Luther and the Fuggers
 - Martin Luther and the Luther family were familiar with the Frugger's well before he entered the ministry or wrestled with complex theology
 - Martin Luther spent his early years in and around the silver mines of the Harz Mountains where his father was a master smelter
- The Fuggers eventually lost power but their banking model remained and others were to follow

Ecclesiastical Authority

	Pre-Christian Teachings (Plato / Aristotle)	Church Hierarchy / Authority	Biblical Canon	Local Church	Post- Christian Philosophy
Christendom	Yes	Papal	Yes - Includes Apocrypha	No	NO
Denominational Protestantism	Partial	Denomination	Yes	Minimal	NO
Eastern Orthodox	Yes	Eastern Church	Yes	No	NO
Evangelicalism	Partial	Partial - varies	Yes	Yes	NO
Catholic pre Vatican II	Yes	Papal	Yes - Includes Apocrypha	No	NO
Catholic post Vatican II (1960's and later)	Yes	Papal	Partial	No	YES – worsened with time
Liberalized Protestantism (1700's and later)	No	Yes	Partial	No	YES – started in 1700's

The Printing Press and Changes in Human Communication

- The advent of the printing press fundamentally changed society from hearing dominant to text dominant
 - change happened relatively quickly and it's important to grasp the significance of this not just in regard to its effect on history, culture, and politics, starting around the reformation time period, but because it also affects our understanding of what came before
- Modern world runs on the premise of literacy and the written word is considered authoritative while oral communication is seen as unreliable and inferior
 - Prior to the printing press, which gave the ability to reproduce and distribute written documents, the economics of creating and distributing printed information on a large scale simply didn't allow this
 - The scribe, in transposing and preserving documents, also played a vital role in what could be considered incremental translation as languages morphed over time and social, technological, and cultural contexts gradually changed
- Under Christendom prior to the printing press and time period of the Reformation, we are dealing with a hearing dominant culture who understood scripture in the context as coming from a hearing dominant culture
- The Reformation produced a vast number of books and other writings
 - By Luther's death it is estimated that one million copies of the Bible had been printed in German
 - Luther wrote extensively and many believe his writing actually shaped the language

The Inquisition, Witch Hunts, and other Offenses

- The Inquisition began in the late 1400's and is used today as icon for repression
 - First 50 years not well documented but as many as 1500 people may have been executed
 - Documented period saw 826 executions (very small percentage of total cases < 2%)
 - From 1480 to 1700 this was about 10 per year compared to 750 per year in England
 - Objective to identify fake converts amongst Moslems and Jews and to protect those who where sincere from periodic outbreaks of mob violence
 - Drastic exaggeration was initiated by Reginaldus Montanus who was a disgruntled monk who became a Lutheran and relocated to Netherlands.
 - In 1567 he wrote a book claiming over 300K executions by that time which became source of academic texts and this has largely survived to modern times.
 - Which hunts were also going on across Europe and even in the American colonies extending into the 1700's, well after the reformation. Notable enlightenment figures had no problem with this.
- Book Burnings
 - The image this would create would be something like crowds clamoring for the works of enlightenment philosophers to free them form religious dogma
 - Back in reality, this sort of material wouldn't be any more widely appreciated then than it is now
 - To the limited extent that this did happen the targeted material was typically pornography which was one of the forms of printed material to take advantage of the printing press

The Rise of the Nation States

- The concept of the modern nation state developed gradually after the Reformation in the western world and shouldn't be projected back in time
- Some of the basic outcomes of this were:
 - The church instead of existing apart from the state became absorbed by the state as an extension of state authority used to justify and support state policies (First denominations were state churches)
 - Participation in the state church becomes mandatory although selectively enforced
 - Participation in religious services, which was never high to begin with, got far worse (in the single digits as a percentage) despite the threat of state enforcement and clergy became lazier and less motivated
 - The common cultural influences provided by Christendom were swept away and were replaced by regional ethnic identities
 - the Catholic Church provided some level of education, charity, and medical assistance even to the poorest and this disappeared
 - Wars which were generally small and fought with professional armies' that exercised restraint, especially with civilian populations, came to be fought with huge armies that increasingly waged unlimited warfare on civilian populations
- Christendom could best be described as a sort of federalist system with no strong central political authority but rather a spiritual and cultural authority. When this fell it gave way to nationalism

Divine Right of Kings

- The Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches are often associated with monarchies and the concept of the “divine right of kings”.
 - no more true than for the protestant churches and is based mainly on their opposition to progressive socialists regimes starting with the French Revolution
 - After the reformation the areas that remained loyal to the Catholic Church in the west and the Orthodox Church in the east retained monarchies longer than England and the US while Germany was fragmented until the 1800’s.
- The Church and Revolution
 - In France the church was initially receptive to some of the objectives of the revolution
 - within a few years the church was outlawed and clergy, along with committed laity, were hunted down and slaughtered in mass
 - Opposed the 1948 Socialist revolutions in Europe. These failed and many of the revolutionaries came to the States and some became prominent.
 - The Spanish Civil War was similar in that the Republican forces, who were sponsored and supplied by Stalin, went about a policy of genocide against Christians and destruction of church property
- The Masons
 - From 1717 forward the primary nemesis of the Catholic Church were the Free Masons which appears to have derived from medieval guilds and during the time period of the Reformation took the form or loosely organized secret societies
 - The mason’s focused heavily on this subject of Church political authority and support of monarchy

Monarchy and Democracy

- In the modern neo-liberal west it is assumed and commonly believed (almost as a doctrinal point) that Democracy is the highest form of political organization
 - It was one of, maybe the first form of human organization
 - Proved to be very unstable and had no protection for individual rights including property rights
 - The nature of a unrestrained democracy is to act opposite of a meritocracy empowering the least capable and creating a “race to the bottom”
- Monarchies generally acted as administrators more than dictators
 - Constrained by “nobility” of meritocracy in the society
 - Tended not to make policy but attempted to maintain order and economic balance
- The founders studied antiquity and were well aware of the issues of democracy
 - That is why we were given a republic
- Regardless of the form of governmental organization, all societies (and other forms or collective entities like businesses) wind up being ruled by some sort of elite
 - The degree of success or failure of a society is largely dependent on the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual maturity of the elite class.
 - There are typically paths to enter elite society – here it has been the Ivy League schools
- The citizenry as a whole will at some point constrain the ruling class if they avoid being manipulated against each other (Hegelian dialectic)