

Section 10 – Roman Christianity

The Reformation

The Protestant Reformation was essentially materialistic rather than spiritual. Its origin was partly in reaction to the continued political power of the Papacy and the corruption that accompanies such absolute power, such as the practice of selling ‘indulgences’.¹ As argument for their ideas, the founders of Protestantism could indeed point to many inconsistencies between Catholic doctrine and the actual words of the Bible. Furthermore, ordinary people, or at least the wealthy and literate, could now see for themselves. The development of water-powered paper mills in the late 14th century CE, and Gutenberg’s invention of letterpress printing half a century later, meant that for the first time, Bibles could be made available cheaply enough for people outside the clergy to have access to them. These factors aided the spread of the new sects.

Despite translation into vernacular language, as for example in King James the VI of Scotland’s seminal version, the codex of the Protestant New Testament was the same as had been decided upon by the founders of the Catholic Church a thousand years before. In doctrinal terms, Protestantism is just Catholicism with a few details changed.² This is most markedly seen in the Anglican Church, which maintains the bureaucratic structure of priest, bishop and archbishop that it inherited from the Catholic Church. In parallel fashion, it confers the power to reign – the gift of the Goddess – from the hands of the Archbishop of Canterbury to the monarch of England.

The most important single cause of the Reformation was not liturgical, technological or economic, however, but bubonic plague which, as the Black Death, started in Crimea in 1346 and spread across Europe, carried by fleas on ship rats.³ By the end of the century it had killed perhaps 200 million people, in waves of horror interspersed with periods of respite when societies struggled to recover and come to terms with the disaster that had befallen them.

After the Piora Oscillation that afflicted Sumer in the late 4th millennium BCE, the culture changed. Inanna was obliged to accept Gilgamesh, on his terms, not hers. This transformation of the society and its beliefs happened because Inanna had treated her faithful so badly, ignoring

¹ An indulgence was the remission of punishment due to sin by forgiving the sin, a sort of ‘get out of Purgatory free’ card.

² The Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant New Testaments are identical. The Catholic Old Testament includes Tobit, Judith, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, I and II Maccabees, and additions to Daniel and Esther. Because these were not in the Jewish biblical canon, Protestant leaders placed them into a group called the ‘Apocrypha’ though they remained part of the Protestant Bible until the 19th century.

³ *Rattus rattus*; also known as black rats.

their pleas for an end to their suffering for centuries. In exactly the same way, the Black Death caused people to question the Catholic Church, which could provide no relief.

When decades of misery endure despite all the praying and offerings, the inevitable result is that people begin to lose faith in their religion. They begin to look for other answers. During the scourge of the Black Death, people turned to their beloved Goddess, through the Catholic Church, for help, but their pleas were ignored. Furthermore, the church had become immensely wealthy, while the European economies collapsed and a new horror was visited upon an already-devastated people – poverty and starvation.

Revolutions do not happen without extreme social tension. Politics and religion are deeply entwined, and religious revolution is, if anything, harder to provoke than the secular form. People cling to the gods and religions they know and love and only powerful and widespread anger will make them change.

So it was with the Protestant Reformation. All the books and printing presses in the world could not have turned people away from the Catholic Church unless they were already fulminating with anger and resentment and seeking change. In pre-Christian Rome, there had been many gods and goddesses, and one could always try another. But in monotheistic Christian Europe this was not available so people began to interpret the Christian message in unorthodox ways. Examples include the Cathars and the Albigenses, and the Church, in the main, tolerated them for decades. It was only when the clerical hierarchy began to feel threatened that they took viciously extreme action and established the Holy Office of the Inquisition to combat heresy.

The re-interpretation of Christianity by the Protestant reformers was one of many such ‘heresies’. The Protestant Reformation was a political, theological and popular reaction against broken promises of relief from suffering made by the increasingly distant and egregiously wealthy religious elite to a people who were dying in the most appalling manner.

The existence of large numbers of mass-produced Bibles, albeit written in Latin, was a resource of immeasurable advantage to the Reformists, and without cheap paper and Gutenberg’s press, the spread of the new cult would have been slower. The Cathar heresy had been spread by word of mouth, by individual priests communicating to one another their theology and then going out into the world and preaching it, exactly as new religious cults had been promulgated for thousands of years. Now, only Bibles had to travel, not people, and anyone who could read Latin – which was any educated person – had access to the revelatory book, the foundation of Catholicism which had been agreed upon and codified by the Catholic Church itself.

The essential core of Protestant belief was that everything Catholic had to be presented as wrong, without actually rejecting Christianity. The reformers held that anything which was not written

in the Bible was not Christian, and it was up to everyone – essentially, every man – to read it for himself and shape his life around it, rather than simply accepting the word of the Catholic Church. The reformers had an easy target. The public mood was ripe for revolution, and technology had given them the means to challenge the huge and omnipresent Catholic Church, not just on a local scale, but across Europe.

The reformers provoked a new mindset that was to become an important feature of their cults: an absolute insistence on the literal truth of every word of the Bible. In the early stages of the Reformation, the first converts were educated people who made up their own minds about what they read. But as Protestantism spread into the less educated strata of society the emphasis became increasingly placed on the acceptance of every word as true. This would lead, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, to American ‘Bible Belt’ fundamentalism, comprising some of the most intolerant Christian cults known today.

Catholicism, based on revelation and interpretation by the priestly class, has never suffered this literalism, and has been able to adapt to changes in society, at least over time. The modern Catholic Church fully accepts the fact of Evolution and the scientifically established age of the Earth. For centuries it has been able to, albeit reluctantly, accommodate advances in science without abandoning its core, because the Bible is to be interpreted in the light of the world we live in, rather than taken as literally true in every word.

Extreme Protestantism cannot allow this and ultimately, centuries later, would confront its followers with a choice: make the world conform to the Bible’s literal words or abandon Christianity altogether. This, perhaps paradoxically, has played badly for Protestants, since the evidence of science makes it clear that the literal word of the Bible cannot be true. This literalism has provoked the absurd hysteria of modern ‘Evangelicals’ and Bible fundamentalists and science-deniers. It has also catalysed the increasing secularism of large numbers of nominal Protestants, who find such denial of reality at best embarrassing.⁴

Catholicism in the early part of the second millennium CE was not as it is today; it was immersed in the Goddess. Today, in places where Marianist Catholicism remains firmly entrenched, such as the Philippines, South America and southern Europe, we can still see incredible devotion to Mary as the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven and the Goddess incarnate. This vision of Mary was the perfect target for the Protestant reformers. They saw it as idolatrous worship of the Goddess, as anathema and fundamentally anti-Christian.

Christianity is based on Goddess theology, since it has at its heart the concept of resurrection, something which we have seen was a part of Goddess worship for 10,000 years at least. Jesus’

⁴ Compare the pragmatic and scholarly stance of Fr George Coyne, of the Catholic Observatory in Rome, with the populist delusions of Ken Ham or Kent Hovind, both prominent ‘creationists’.

message is the Goddess' message. But Mary's role as the Goddess had been expressed symbolically in the Gospels, implied rather than boldly stated, in order to avoid offending the deeply conservative and patriarchal Jewish authorities of Judea and Galilee where the cult of Christianity first appeared. This was an apparent discrepancy that the Protestant reformers could use as theological ammunition.

The Catholic Church was primarily concerned with the New Testament, the actual Christian writings, and tended to give far less weight to the Old, the Hebrew writings. These two bodies of work are diametrically opposed. The Old is profoundly conservative, misogynist, understands redemption in a temporal way and has only a vague concept of Resurrection. It is judgemental and harsh. The New, on the other hand, is all about spiritual redemption and resurrection in a body incarnate. It is quintessentially forgiving, because it is based on the message of Goddess theology.

The two collections could not be more contradictory in their underlying messages, something the Catholic tradition had got around by essentially ignoring the Old Testament and basing its dogma on the New. Protestant reformers like Luther and Calvin, and the latter's follower, Knox, latched onto this. They set out to attack Catholicism and to spread misogyny by basing their core beliefs in the Old Testament instead; which we have previously described as the Reference Manual of Western Patriarchy.⁵

It is impossible to equally believe in the Old and New Testaments, because they are directly contradictory. Christians have to promote one set of values over the other. The Catholic tradition is fundamentally that of the New Testament: they wrote it and they decided on its canon. The Protestant tradition, being reactive against that, had to lean far more heavily on the Old Testament.

What Luther, Calvin, and Knox created was a cult every bit as harsh, dry and judgemental as first-century Judaism had been, but which had at its centre a god-hero preaching the Goddess theology of love, forgiveness and resurrection. One may occasionally spare a moment of wry sympathy for those still trying to resolve this conundrum.⁶

⁵ The extent of Knox's venomous misogyny was recorded by Mary Queen of Scots; her description of him is telling. (Fraser, Antonia. *Mary Queen of Scots*. Phoenix. 2009.)

⁶ But only a moment; *schadenfreude* is far too compelling to let it last.