

# The Kingdom Strikes Back: Ten Epochs of Redemptive History

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**M**an has virtually erased his own story. Human beings as far back as we have any paleological record have been fighting each other so much that they have destroyed well over 90 percent of their own handiwork. Their libraries, their literature, their cities, their works of art are mostly gone. Even the little that remains from the distant past is riddled with evidences of a strange and pervasive evil that has grotesquely distorted man's potential.

This is strange because apparently no other species treats its own with such deadly hatred. The oldest skulls bear mute witness that they were bashed in and roasted to deliver their contents as food for other human beings. An incredible array of disease germs also cuts down population growth.

World population in Abraham's day is estimated at 27 million—less than the population of California in AD 2000. But, the small slow-growing population of Abraham's day is mute, and ominous evidence exists of the devastating combination of war and pestilence, both the relentless impact of the Evil One. World population growth back then was one-sixteenth of today's global rate. As hatred and disease are conquered, world population instantly picks up speed. If today's relatively slow global growth rate to have happened in Abraham's day, our present world population (of 6 billion) would have been reached back then in just 321 years! Thus, in those days, evil must have been much more rampant than now.

We are not surprised, then, to find that the explanation for this strange evil comes up in the oldest detailed written records—surviving documents that are respected by Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions whose adherents make up more than half of the world's population. These documents called “the Torah,” by Jews, the “Books of the Law” by Christians, and “the Taurat” by Muslims not only explain the strange source of evil but also describe a counter-campaign and then follow the progress of that campaign through many centuries.

To be specific, the first eleven chapters of Genesis constitute a scary “introduction” to the entire problem, indeed, to the plot of the entire Bible. Those few pages describe three things: 1) a glorious and “good” original creation; 2) the entrance of a rebellious and destructive evil—superhuman, demonic person—resulting in 3) a humanity caught up in that rebellion and brought under the power of that evil person.

Don't ever think that the whole remainder of the Bible is simply a bundle of divergent, unrelated stories as taught in Sunday School. Rather, the Bible consists of a single drama: the entrance of the Kingdom, the power and the glory of the living God in this enemy-occupied territory. From Genesis 12 to the end of the Bible, and indeed until the end of time, there unfolds the single, coherent drama of "the Kingdom strikes back." This would make a good title for the Bible itself were it to be printed in modern dress (with Gen 1-11 as the introduction to the whole Bible). In this unfolding drama we see the gradual but irresistible power of God reconquering and redeeming His fallen creation through the giving of His own Son at the very center of the 4000-year period ending in 2000 BC. This is tersely summed up: "The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 Jn 3:6).

The Bible consists of a single drama: the entrance of the Kingdom, the power and the glory of the living God in this enemy-occupied territory.

This counterattack against the Evil One clearly does not await the appearance of the good Person in the center of the story. Indeed, there would seem to be five identifiable epochs of advance *prior* to the appearance of Christ as well as five after that event. The purpose of this chapter is mainly to describe the five epochs *after* Christ. However, in order for those later epochs to be seen as part of a single ten-epoch 4,000-year unfolding story, we will note a few clues about the first five epochs.

The theme that links all ten epochs is the grace of God intervening in a "world which lies in the power of the Evil One" (1 Jn 5:19), contesting an enemy who temporarily is "the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4) so that the nations will praise God's name. His plan for doing this is to reach all peoples by conferring an unusual "blessing" on Abraham and Abraham's seed (Abraham's children-by-faith), even as we pray "Thy Kingdom come." By contrast, the Evil One's plan is to bring reproach on the Name of God. The Evil

One stirs up hate, distorts even DNA sequences, perhaps authors suffering and all destruction of God's good creation. Satan's devices may very well include devising virulent germs in order to tear down confidence in God's loving character.

Therefore this "blessing" is a key concept. The English word *blessing* is not an ideal translation. We see the word in use where Isaac confers his "blessing" on Jacob and not on Esau. It was not "blessings" but "a blessing," the conferral of a family name, responsibility, obligation, as well as privilege. It is not something you can receive or get like a box of chocolates you can run off with and eat by yourself in a cave, or a new personal power you can show off like rippling muscles. It is something you *become* in a permanent *relationship and fellowship* with your Father in Heaven. It returns "families," that is, *nations* to His household, to the Kingdom

of God, so that the nations "will declare His glory."

Preventing the nations from declaring His glory are any evidences of God's inability to cope with evil. If the Son of

God appeared to destroy the works of the Devil, then what are the Son of God's followers and "joint heirs" supposed to do to bring honor to His Name?

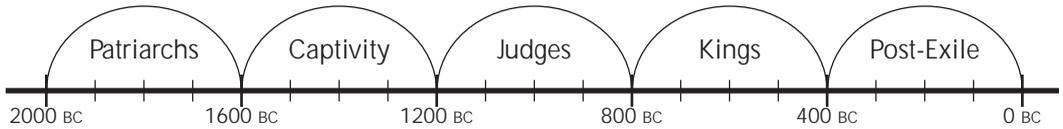
This "blessing" of God is in effect conditioned upon its being shared with other nations, since those who yield to and receive God's blessing are, like Abraham, those of faith who subject themselves to God's will, become part of His Kingdom, and represent the extension of His rule, His power, His authority within all other peoples.

### The First Half of the 4,000-Year Story

The story of the "strike back" as we see it in Genesis 12 begins in about 2000 BC. During roughly the next 400 years, Abraham was chosen, and moved to the geographic center of the Afro-Asian land mass. The time of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph (often called the Period of the Patriarchs) displays relatively small breakthroughs of witness to the surrounding nations even though the



## Ten Epochs of Redemptive History: *The First Half 2000 – 0 BC*



central mandate to restore God's control over all nations (Gen 12:1-3) is repeated twice again to Abraham (18:18, 22:18), and once to both Isaac (26:4) and Jacob (28:14,15).

Joseph observed to his brothers, "You sold me, but God sent me." He was obviously a great blessing to the nation of Egypt. Even Pharaoh recognized that Joseph was filled with the Spirit of God (Gen 41:38, *TLB*). But this was not the *intentional* missionary obedience God wanted. Joseph's brothers, for example, had not taken up an offering and sent him to Egypt as a missionary! God was in the missions business whether they were or not.

The next four periods, roughly 400 years each, are: 2) the Captivity, 3) the Judges, 4) the Kings and 5) that of the Babylonian Exile and dispersion (*diaspora*). During this rough and tumble, the promised *blessing* and the expected *mission* (to extend God's rule to all the nations of the world) all but disappear from sight. As a result, where possible, God accomplished His will through the *voluntary* obedience of His people, but where necessary, He accomplished His will through *involuntary* means. Joseph, Jonah, the nation as a whole when taken captive represent the category of *involuntary* missionary outreach intended by God to force the extension of the blessing. The little girl carried away captive to the house of Naaman the Syrian was able to share her faith. Naomi, who "went" a distance away, shared her faith with her children and their non-Jewish wives. On the other hand, Ruth, her daughter-in-law, Naaman the Syrian, and the Queen of Sheba all "came" *voluntarily*, attracted by God's blessing-relationship with Israel.

Note, then, the four different "mission mechanisms" at work to bless other peoples: 1) going voluntarily, 2) involuntarily going without missionary intent, 3) coming voluntarily, and 4) coming involuntarily (as with Gentiles forcibly settled in Israel—2 Kings 17).

Thus, we see in every epoch the active concern of God to forward His mission, with

or without the full cooperation of His chosen nation. When Jesus appears, it is an in-criminating "visitation." He comes to His own, and "His own receive Him not" (John 1:11). He is well received in Nazareth until He refers to God's desire to bless the Gentiles. At that precise moment (Luke 4:28) an explosion of homicidal fury betrays the fact that this chosen nation—chosen to receive *and to mediate* the blessing (Ex 19:5, 6; Ps 67; Isa 49:6)—has grossly fallen short. There was indeed a sprinkling of fanatical "Bible students" who "traversed land and sea to make a single proselyte" (Matt 23:15). But such outreach was not so much to be a blessing to the other nations as it was to sustain and protect Israel. They were not always making sure that their converts were "circumcised in heart" (Deut 10:16, 30:6, Jer 9:24-26, Rom 2:29).

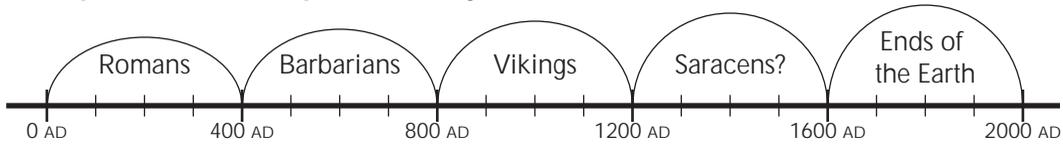
In effect, and under these circumstances, Jesus did not come to *give* the Great Commission but to *take it away*. The natural branches were broken off while other "unnatural" branches were grafted in (Rom 11:13-24). But, despite the general reluctance of the chosen missionary nation—typical of other nations later—many people groups were in fact touched due to the faithfulness and righteousness of some. These groups come to mind: Canaanites, Egyptians, Philistines (of the ancient Minoan culture), Hittites, Moabites, Phoenicians (of Tyre and Sidon), Assyrians, Sabeans (of the land of Sheba), Babylonians, Persians, Parthians, Medes, Elamites and Romans.

### The Second Half of the Story

The next 2,000-year period is one in which God, on the basis of the intervention of His Son, makes sure that the other nations are both blessed and *similarly called* "to be a blessing to all the families of the earth." In each case, "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him (of that people) shall much be re-



## Ten Epochs of Redemptive History: *The Second Half 0 – 2000 AD*



quired.” Now we see the Kingdom striking back in the realms of the Armenians, the Romans, the Celts, the Franks, the Angles, the Saxons, the Germans, and eventually even those ruthless pagan pirates further north called the Vikings. All these people-basins will be invaded, tamed and subjugated by the power of the gospel, and in turn expected to share that blessing with still other peoples (instead of raiding them).

But in one sense the next five epochs are not all that different from the first five epochs. Those nations that are blessed do not seem terribly eager to share that unique blessing and extend that new kingdom. The Celts are the most active nation in the first millennium to give an outstanding missionary response. As we will see—just as in the Old Testament—the conferral of this unique blessing will bring sober responsibility, dangerous if unfulfilled. And we will see repeated again and again God’s use of the full range of His four missionary mechanisms.

The “visitation” of the Christ was dramatic, full of portent and strikingly “in due time.” Jesus was born a member of a subjugated people. Yet in spite of her bloody imperialism, Rome was truly an instrument in God’s hands to prepare the world for His coming. Rome controlled one of the largest empires the world has ever known, forcing the Roman peace (the “Pax Romana”) upon all sorts of disparate and barbaric peoples. For centuries Roman emperors had been building an extensive communication system, both in the 250,000 miles of marvelous roads which stretched throughout the empire, and in the rapid transmission of messages and documents somewhat like the Pony Express on the American frontier. In its conquests, Rome enveloped at least one civilization far more advanced than her own—Greece. Highly-educated artisans and teachers were taken as slaves to every major city of the empire where they taught the Greek

language. Greek was thus understood from England to Palestine.

Equally important to our thesis is the less known but empire-wide substratum of obedience and righteousness—the massive and marvelous presence of diaspora Jews, more respected in their dispersion than in their home land! Scholars agree that their numbers had grown to 10 percent of the Roman population. The virile element within this Jewish presence—those “circumcised in heart”—played a large part in attracting many Gentiles to the fringes of the synagogues. Many of these Gentiles, like those of Cornelius’ household, became earnest Bible readers and worshipers—people the New Testament calls “devout persons” or “God-fearers.” This way the faith jumped the ethnic borders! Such *God-fearers* became the steel rails on which the Christian movement expanded. This movement was basically the Jewish faith in Gentile clothing, something—take note—which was understandably hard for earnest Jews to conceive.

How else could a few Gospels and a few letters from St. Paul have had such a widespread impact within so many different ethnic groups in such a short period of time?

Stop and ponder: Jesus came, lived for 33 years on earth, confronted His own unenthusiastic missionary nation, was rejected by many, was crucified and buried, rose again, and underscored the same longstanding commission to all who would respond, before ascending to the Father. Today even the most agnostic historian stands amazed that what began in a humble stable in Bethlehem of Palestine, a backwater of the Roman Empire, in less than 300 years was given control of the emperors’ palace in Rome. How did it happen? It is a truly incredible story.

### No Saints in the Middle?

It is wise to interrupt the story here. If you haven’t heard this story before you may con-



front a psychological problem. In church circles today we have fled, feared or forgotten these middle centuries. Hopefully, fewer and fewer of us will continue to think in

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Smith, Ellen White or John Wimber. The result of this kind of BOBO approach is that you have “early” saints and “latter-day” saints, but *no saints in the middle*. Thus, many Evangelicals are not much interested in what happened prior to the Protestant Reformation. They have the vague impression that the Church was apostate before Luther and Calvin, and whatever there was of real Christianity consisted of a few persecuted individuals here and there. For example, in the multi-volume *Twenty Centuries of Great Preaching*, only half of the first volume is devoted to the first 15 centuries! In evangelical Sunday Schools, children are busy as beavers with the story of God’s work from Genesis to Revelation, from Adam to the Apostles—and their Sunday School publishers may even boast about their “all-Bible curriculum.” But this only really means that these children do not get exposed to all the incredible things God did with that Bible between the times of the Apostles and the Reformers, a period which is staggering proof of the unique power of the Bible! To many people, it is as if there were “no saints in the middle.”

In the space available, however, it is only possible to outline the Western part of the story of the kingdom striking back—and only outline. It will be very helpful to recognize the various cultural basins in which

terms of what may be called a fairly extreme form of the “BOBO” theory—that the Christian faith somehow “Blinked Out” after the Apostles and “Blinked On” again in our time, or whenever our modern “prophets” arose, be they Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Joseph

that invasion has taken place. Kenneth Scott Latourette’s *History of Christianity* gives the fascinating details, a book extending the story beyond the Bible. (A book more valuable than any other, apart from the Bible!)

Note the pattern in the chart on page 211. Latourette’s “resurgences” correspond to our “renaissances.”

In Period I, Rome was won but did not reach out with the gospel to the barbaric Celts and Goths. Almost as a penalty, the Goths invaded Rome and the whole western (Latin) part of the empire caved in.

In Period II, the Goths were added in, and they and others briefly achieved a new “Holy” Roman Empire. But this new sphere did not effectively reach further north with the gospel.

In Period III, again almost as a penalty, the Vikings invaded these Christianized Celtic and Gothic barbarians. In the resulting agony, the Vikings, too, became Christians.

In Period IV, Europe now united for the first time by Christian faith, reached out in a sort of pseudo-mission to the Saracens in the great abortion known as the Crusades.

In Period V, Europe now reached out to the very ends of the earth, but still done with highly mixed motives; intermingled commercial and spiritual interests was both a blight and a blessing. Yet, during this period, the entire non-Western world was suddenly stirred into development as the colonial powers greatly reduced war and disease. Never before had so few affected so many, even though never before had so great a gap existed between two halves of the world. What will happen in the next few years?

Will the immeasurably strengthened non-Western world invade Europe and America just as the Goths invaded Rome and the Vikings overran Europe? Will the “Third World” turn on us in a new series of “Barbarian” invasions? Will the OPEC nations gradually buy us out and take us over?

Clearly we face the reaction of an awakened non-Western world that is suddenly beyond our control. What will be the role of the gospel? Can we gain any insight from these previous cycles of outreach?



## Period I: Winning the Romans, A.D. 0–400

Perhaps the most spectacular triumph of Christianity in history was its conquest of the Roman Empire in roughly 20 decades. There is a lot more we would like to know about this period. Our lack of knowledge makes much of it a mystery, and the growth of Christianity sounds impossible, almost unbelievable—especially if we do not take into account the Jewish substratum. Only the early part of the story starts out emblazoned in the floodlight of the New Testament epistles themselves. Let's take a glance at that.

There we see a Jew named Paul brought up in a Greek city, committed to leadership in the Jewish tradition of his time. Suddenly he is transformed by Christ and gradually comes to see that the essence of the faith of the Jews as fulfilled in Christ could operate without Jewish garments. He realized that an inner circumcision of the heart could be clothed in Greek language and customs as well as Semitic! It should have become crystal clear to everyone that anyone can become a Christian and be transformed in the inner man by the living Christ, whether Jew, Greek, Barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, male or female. The Greeks didn't have to become Jews—undergo physical circumcision, take over the Jewish calendar of festivals or holy days nor even observe Jewish dietary customs—any more than a woman had to be made into a man to be acceptable to God. What was necessary was the “obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5, 16:26).

Paul based his work on the radical biblical principle (unaccepted by many Jews to this day) that it is circumcision of the *heart* that counts (Jer 9), and that the new believers of a new culture did not have to speak the language, wear the clothes, or follow all the customs of the sending church. This meant that for Greeks the cultural details of the Jewish law were no longer to be considered mandatory. Therefore, to the Jews, Paul continued as one “under the law of Moses,” but to those unfamiliar with the Mosaic law, he preached the “law of Christ” in such a way that it could be fulfilled dynamically and authentically in the new circumstances. While to some he appeared to be “without law,” he maintained that he was not without law to-

ward God. Indeed, as far as the basic purpose of the Mosaic Law is concerned, the Greek believers immediately developed the functional equivalent to it in their own cultural terms while most of them held on as well to what is often called the Old Testament. After all, it was “the Bible of the early church” (as well as of the Jews), that had led them to belief in the first place.

We may get the impression that mission activity in this period benefitted very little from deliberately organized effort. That may well be only because its structure was transparent: Paul apparently worked within a well-known “missionary team” structure used by the Pharisees—even by Paul himself when he was a Pharisee! Paul's sending congregation in Antioch certainly undertook some responsibility. But, basically, they “sent him off” more than they “sent him out.” His traveling team had all of the authority of any local church. He did not look for orders from Antioch.

There is good reason to suppose that the Christian faith spread in many areas by the “involuntary-go” mechanism, because Christians were often dispersed as the result of persecutions. We know that fleeing Arian Christians had a lot to do with the conversion of the Goths. We have the stories of Ulfilas and Patrick whose missionary efforts were in each case initiated by the accident of their being taken captive.

Furthermore, it is reasonable to suppose that Christianity followed the trade routes of the Roman Empire. We know that there was a close relationship and correspondence between Christians in Gaul and Asia Minor. Yet we must face the fact that the early Christians of the Roman Empire (and Christians today!) were only rarely willing and able to take conscious practical steps to fulfill the Great Commission. In view of the amazing results in those early decades, however, we are all the more impressed by the innate power of the gospel itself.

One intriguing possibility of the natural transfer of the gospel within a given social unit is the case of the Celts. Historical studies clarify for us that the province of Galatia in Asia Minor was called so because it was settled by *Galatoi* from Western Europe (who as late as the fourth century still spoke both



their original Celtic tongue and also the Greek of that part of the Roman Empire). Whether or not Paul's Galatians were merely Jewish traders living in the province of Galatia, or were from the beginning Celtic *Galatoi* who were attracted to synagogues as "God fearers," we note in any case that Paul's letter to the Galatians is especially wary of anyone pushing over on his readers the mere *outward customs* of the Jewish culture and confusing such customs with *essential biblical faith* which he preached to both Jew and Greek (Rom 1:16). A matter of high missionary interest is the fact that Paul's preaching had tapped into a cultural vein of Celtic humanity that may soon have included friends, relatives and trade contacts reaching a great distance to the west. Thus Paul's efforts in Galatia may give us one clue to the surprisingly early penetration of the gospel into the main Celtic areas of Europe, comprising a belt running across southern Europe clear over into Galicia in Spain, Brittany in France and up into the western and northern parts of the British Isles.

There came a time when not only hundreds of thousands of Greek and Roman citizens had become Christians, but Celtic-speaking peoples and Gothic tribal peoples as well had believed within their own forms for various versions of biblical faith, both within and beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. It is probable that the missionary work behind this came about mainly through unplanned processes involving Christians from the eastern part of the Roman Empire. In any case this achievement certainly cannot readily be credited to the planned missionary initiative of *Latin-speaking* Romans in the West. This is the point we are trying to make.

One piece of evidence is the fact that the earliest Irish mission compounds (distinguished from the Latin-Roman type by a central chapel) followed a ground plan derived from Christian centers in *Egypt*. And *Greek*, not Latin, was the language of the early churches in Gaul. Even the first organized mission efforts of John Cassian and Martin of Tours, for example, *came from the East* by means of commune structures begun in Syria and Egypt. Fortunately, these organized efforts carried with them a strong emphasis on

literacy and the studying and copying of biblical manuscripts and ancient Greek classics.

As amazed pagan leaders looked on, the cumulative impact of this new, much more acceptable clothing of biblical faith grew to prominent proportions by AD 300. We don't know with any confidence what personal reasons Constantine had in AD 312 for declaring himself a Christian. We know that his mother in Asia Minor was a Christian, and that his father, as a co-regent in Gaul and Britain, did not enforce in his area the Diocletian edicts commanding persecution of Christians. However, by this time in history the inescapable factor is that there were enough Christians in the Roman Empire to make an official reversal of policy toward Christianity not only feasible but politically wise. I well recall a lecture by the late Professor Lynn White, Jr. of U.C.L.A., one of the great medieval historians, in which he said that even if Constantine had not become a Christian, the empire could not have held out against Christianity more than another decade or two! The long development of the Roman Empire had ended the local autonomy of the city-state and created a widespread need for a sense of belonging—he called it a crisis of identity. At that time Christianity was the one religion that had no nationalism at its root, partly because it was rejected by the Jews! It was not the folk religion of any one tribe. In White's words, it had developed "an unbeatable combination." However, this virtue became a mixed blessing once it became aligned with the Empire.

Thus, it is the very power of the movement which helps to explain why the momentous imperial decision to *tolerate* Christianity almost inevitably led to its becoming (roughly 50 years later) the *official* religion of the Empire. Not long after the curtain rises on Christianity as an officially *tolerated* religion, the head of the Christian community in Rome turns out astonishingly to be the strongest and most trusted man around. That's why Constantine, when he moved the seat of government to Constantinople, left his palace (the famous Lateran Palace) to the people of the Christian community as their "White House" in Rome. In any case, it is simply a matter of record that by AD 375,



Christianity had become the official religion of Rome. If it had merely been an ethnic cult, it could not have been even a candidate as an official religion of the Empire.

Ironically, however, once Christianity became locked into a specific cultural tradition and political loyalty, it tended automatically to alienate all who were anti-Roman. Even being *tolerated* instantly created suspicion and then soon widespread slaughter of “Christians” in Arabia and what is now Iran. This persecution stopped for three years, when a Roman emperor (Julian the Apostate) *opposed* Christianity and tried to roll things back to the pagan gods! Meanwhile, even in the case of anti-Roman populations within the Empire’s boundaries, as in North Africa, the foundation was laid for people to turn to Islam as an alternative. This in one sense was a cultural breakaway from Christianity just as Christianity had been a breakaway from the Jewish form of the biblical faith. Similarly “Black Muslims” today deliberately reject the “white man’s religion.”

Thus, the political triumph of what eventually came to be known as *Christianity* was in fact a mixed blessing. The biblical faith could wear other than Jewish clothes; it was now dressed in Roman clothes; but if these new clothes were normative, it would not be expected to spread far beyond the political boundaries of the Roman Empire. It didn’t, except in the West. Why was that?

No one questions that when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, it became ill-equipped by its very form to complete the Great Commission with any populace that was anti-Roman. As we might expect, only Christianity of a heretical variety was accepted by the Germanic tribes while Rome was still strong militarily. But once the tribal peoples discovered it possible to invade and conquer the western half of the Roman Empire, the Catholic and Orthodox forms of the faith became less threatening because the Goths and others could now try to acquire the prestige of the Roman language and culture without being dominated by the Roman legions.

Note, however, the domino results of partially Christianized Gothic barbarians threatening Rome: the Romans in defense pulled their legions out of Britain. As a result, four

centuries of Roman literacy in southern Britain were soon extinguished by a new form of invading barbarians—Angles, Saxons and Frisians who, compared to the Goths, were total pagans, cruel and destructive. What would happen now? Thus began the “First” of the two Dark Ages.

### Period II: Winning the Barbarians, A.D. 400–800

It is a fact that when the earlier (Gothic) tribal peoples became Christianized into an antagonistic Arian form of the faith, they became a greater and greater military threat to Rome. All it took for this threat to become a true menace was for the feared Huns to punch into Europe from Central Asia. This pushed the panicked Visigoths (and then the Ostrogoths and then the Vandals) inside the Empire. In the turmoil and confusion these tribal incursions somewhat unintentionally wrecked the entire network of civil government in the West (in today’s Italy, Spain and North Africa). Later they tried seriously to rebuild it.

(Was all this something like the post-colonial chaos in Africa after the Second World War?) In fact, the only reason the city of Rome itself was not physically devastated by the invasions, which arrived finally at the gates of Rome in 410, was that these Gothic Barbarians were, all things considered, really very respectful of life and property, especially that of the churches! It was a huge benefit to citizens of Rome that earlier informal missionary effort—for which Latin Roman Christians could claim little credit—had brought these peoples into at least a superficial Christian faith. Even secular Romans observed how lucky they were that the invaders held high certain standards of Christian morality. Not so the Angles and Saxons who invaded Britain.

We are tantalized by the reflection that this much was accomplished by informal and almost unconscious sharing of the gospel—e.g. the news and authority of the *blessing* being extended to all Gentile nations. How much better might it have been if the Romans—during that brief hundred years of official flourishing of Christianity (310-410) prior to the first Gothic invasion of the city of Rome—had



been devoted to energetic and intentional missionary effort. Even a little heretical Christianity prevented the Barbarians from that total disregard of civilization which was to be shown by the Vikings in the third period. Perhaps a little more missionary work might have prevented the complete collapse of the governmental structure of the Roman Empire in the West. Today, for example, the ability of the new African states to maintain a stable government is to a great extent dependent upon their degree of Christianization (that is, both in knowledge and morality).

In any case, we confront the ominous phenomenon of partially Christianized barbarian hordes being emboldened and enabled to pour in upon a complacent, officially Christian empire that had failed effectively to reach out to them. The tribal peoples were quick to acquire Roman military skills, often serving as mercenaries in the Roman legions.

[These events may remind us of our relation to the present-day colossus of China. The country of China, like the Barbarians north of Rome, has been crucially affected by Christianity even though bitterly opposed to its alien connections. And they have gained nuclear power. Can you imagine why they vigorously opposed the Pope's appointment of a Cardinal within their midst? After the Second World War they adopted "Chinese communism" extensively and profoundly, which was a kind of superficial "faith" embodying a number of distinctively Christian ingredients—despite the often grave distortion of those Christian elements. Just as a modicum of Christian faith in some ways strengthened the hand of the Barbarians against the Romans, so the country of China today is awesomely more dangerous due to the cleansing, integrating and galvanizing effect of the Communist philosophy and cell (structure which is clearly derived from the West, and indirectly from the Christian tradition itself). You can imagine the Barbarians criticizing the softness and degeneracy of the Roman Christians just as

the country of China denounced both the Russians for failing to live up to Communist standards and the West for its pornography and crime.]

Whether or not the Romans had it coming (for failing to reach out), and whether or not the Barbarians were both encouraged and tempered in their conquest by their initial Christian awareness, the indisputable fact is that while the Romans lost the western half of their empire, the Barbarian world, in a very dramatic sense, gained a Christian faith.

The immediate result: right within the city

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and Goths.**

of Rome appeared two "denominations," the one Arian and the other Athanasian. Also in the picture was the Celtic "church," which was more a series of missionary compounds than it was a denomination made up of local churches. Still less like a church was an organization called the Benedictines, which came along later to compete with the Celts in establishing missionary compounds all over Europe. By the time the Vikings appeared on the horizon there had spread up through Europe over 1,000 such mission compounds.

*Mission compounds?* Protestants, and perhaps even modern Catholics, must pause at this phenomenon. Our problem in understanding these strange (and much misunderstood) instruments of evangelization is not so much our ignorance of what these people did as our prejudice which developed because of decadent monks who lived almost a thousand years later. It is wholly unfair for us to judge the work of a traveling evangelist like Columban or Boniface by the stagnation of the wealthy Augustinians in Luther's day—although we must certainly pardon Luther for thinking such thoughts.

It is indisputable that the chief characteristic of these "Jesus People" in this second period, whether they were Celtic *peregrini* (wandering evangelists) or their parallel in Benedictine communes, was the fact that they held the Bible in awe. They sang their way



through the whole book of Psalms each week as a routine discipline. It was primarily they who enabled the Kingdom and the power and the glory to be shared with the barbaric Anglo-Saxons and Goths.

It is true that many strange, even bizarre and pagan customs were mixed up as secondary elements in the various forms of Christianity that were active during the period of the Christianization of Europe. The headlong collision and ongoing competition between Western Roman and Celtic (mainly of Eastern origin) forms of Christianity undoubtedly resulted in an enhancement of common biblical elements in their faith. But we must remember the relative chaos introduced by the invasions, and therefore not necessarily expect to see the usual parish churches that once were familiar in rural America dotting the landscape.

#### **Enter: The Orders**

Under the particular circumstances of that time, similar to many chaotic corners of the world today, the most durable structure around was the *order*—a fellowship much more highly disciplined and tightly-knit than the usual American Protestant congregation today. Its “houses” came to dot the landscape of Europe. We must admit, furthermore, that these novel Christian communities not only were the source of spirituality and scholarship during the Middle Ages, but they also preserved the technologies of the Roman industrial world—tanning, dyeing, weaving, metalworking, masonry skills, bridge building, etc. Their civil, charitable and even scientific contribution is, in general, grossly underestimated—especially by Protestants who have developed unfriendly stereotypes about “monks.” Probably the greatest accomplishment of these disciplined Christian communities is seen in the simple fact that almost all our knowledge of the Roman world is derived from their libraries, whose silent testimony reveals the appreciation they had, even as Christians, for the “pagan” authors of ancient times.

Thus, in our secular age it is embarrassing to recognize that had it not been for these highly literate “mission field” Christians who

preserved and copied manuscripts (not only of the Bible but of ancient Christian and non-Christian classics as well), we would know no more about the Roman Empire today than we do of the Mayan or Incan empires, or many other empires that have long since almost vanished from sight.

Many Evangelicals might be jolted by the Wheaton professor who wrote an appreciative chapter about these disciplined *order* structures entitled, “The Monastic Rescue of the Church.” One sentence stands out:

The rise of monasticism was, after Christ’s commission to his disciples, the most important—and in many ways the most beneficial—institutional event in the history of Christianity (p. 84).<sup>1</sup>

Curiously, our phrase *Third World* comes from those days when Greek and Latin were the first two worlds and the barbarians to the north were the *Third World*. Using this phrase, Barbarian Europe was won more by the witness and labors of Celtic and Anglo-Saxon converts of the Celts—“Third World missionaries”—than by the efforts of missionaries deriving from Italy or Gaul. This fact was to bear decisively upon the apparently permanent shift of power in Western Europe from the Mediterranean to northern Europe. Even as late as AD 596, when Rome’s first missionary headed north (with serious faintheartedness), he incidentally crossed the path of the much more daring and widely-traveled Irish missionary, Columban, one of the scholarly Celtic *peregrini* who had worked his way practically to Rome’s doorstep and who was already further from his birthplace than Augustine was planning to go from his.

We are not surprised that Constantinople was considered the “Second Rome” by those living in the East, nor that both Aachen (in Charlemagne’s France) and Moscow were later to compete for recognition as new Romes by the descendants of the newly Christianized Franks and Slavs, respectively. Neither the original Rome as a city nor the Italian peninsula as a region were ever again to be politically as significant as the chief cities of the new nations—Spain, France, Germany, and England.



### *Enter Charlemagne*

Toward the end of the second period, as with the end of each of these periods, there was a great flourishing of Christianity within the new cultural basin. The rise of a strong man like Charlemagne facilitated communication throughout Western Europe to a degree unknown for 300 years. Under his sponsorship a whole range of issues—social, theological, political—were soberly restudied in the light of the Bible and the writings of earlier Christian leaders in the Roman period. Charlemagne was a second Constantine in certain respects, and his influence was unmatched in Western Europe during a half a millennium.

But Charlemagne was much more of a Christian than Constantine and as such industriously sponsored far more Christian activity. Like Constantine, his official espousal of Christianity produced many Christians who were Christians in name only. There is little doubt that the great missionary Boniface was slain by the Saxons because his patron, Charlemagne (with whose military policies he did not at all agree) had brutally suppressed the Saxons on many occasions. Then, as in our own recent past, the political force of a colonial power did not so much pave the way for Christianity, as turn people against the faith. Of interest to missionaries is the fact that the great centers of learning established by Charlemagne were copies and expansions of newly established mission compounds deep in German territory, themselves outposts that were the work of British and Celtic missionaries from sending centers as far away to the west as Britain's Iona and Lindisfarne.

Indeed, the first serious attempt at anything like public education was initiated by this great tribal chieftain, Charlemagne, on the advice and impulse of Anglo-Celtic missionaries and scholars from Britain, such as Alcuin, whose projects eventually required the help of thousands of literate Christians from Britain and Ireland to man schools founded on the Continent. It is hard to believe, but formerly "barbarian" Irish teachers of Latin (never a native tongue in Ireland) were eventually needed to teach Latin in Rome. This indicates extensively how the tribal invasions of other barbarians had broken down the civilization of the Roman Em-

pire. This reality underlies Thomas Cahill's book, *How the Irish Saved Civilization*.

The Celtic Christians and their Anglo-Saxon and Continental converts especially treasured the Bible. Mute testimony to the Bible as their chief source of inspiration is that the highest works of art during these "dark" centuries were marvelously "illuminated" biblical manuscripts and devoutly ornamented church buildings. Manuscripts of non-Christian classical authors, though preserved and copied, were not illuminated. Through the long night of the progressive breakdown of the Western part of the Roman Empire, when the tribal migrations reduced almost all of life in the West to the level of the tribesmen themselves, the two great regenerating ideals were the hope of building anew the glory that was once Rome, and the hope of making everything subject to the Lord of Glory. The one really high point, when these twin objectives were most nearly achieved, was during Charlemagne's long, vigorous career centered around the year 800. As one recent scholar put it,

In the long sweep of European history, from the decline of the Roman Empire to the flowering of the Renaissance nearly a thousand years later, his [Charlemagne's] is the sole commanding presence.

No wonder recent scholars call Charlemagne's period the Carolingian Renaissance, and thus replace the concept of a single lengthy "dark ages" for a more precise perspective of a First Dark Ages early in this period, and a Second Dark Ages early in the next period, with a "Carolingian Renaissance" in between.

Unfortunately, the rebuilt empire (later to be called the Holy Roman Empire) was unable to find the ingredients of a Charlemagne in his successor; even more ominously, a new threat now posed itself externally. Charlemagne had been eager for his own peoples to be made Christian—the Germanic tribes. He offered wise, even spiritual leadership in many affairs, but did not throw his weight behind any kind of bold mission outreach to the Scandinavian peoples to the north. What missionary work was begun under his son was too little and too late. This fact contributed greatly to the undoing of the his empire.



### Period III: Winning the Vikings, A.D. 800–1200

No sooner had the consolidation in Western Europe been accomplished under Charlemagne than a new menace appeared to peace and prosperity. This new menace—the Vikings—would create a second period of at least semi-darkness to last 250 years. These savages further north had not yet been effectively evangelized. While the tribal invaders of Rome, who created the First Dark Ages, were rough forest people, they were, for the most part, nominally Arian Christians. The Vikings, by contrast, were neither civilized nor even lightly Christian. There was another difference: the Vikings were men of the sea. This meant that key island sanctuaries for missionary training, like Iona, or like the offshore promontory of Lindisfarne (connected to the land only at low tide), were as vulnerable to attacking seafarers as they had been invulnerable to attackers from the land. In this new period both of these mission centers were sacked more than a dozen times, their occupants slaughtered or sold off as slaves. It seems unquestionable that the Christians of Charlemagne's empire would have fared far better had the Vikings had at least the appreciation of the Christian faith that the earlier barbarians had when they overran Rome. The very opposite of the Visigoths and Vandals who spared the churches, the Vikings seemed attracted like magnets to the monastic centers of scholarship and Christian devotion. They took a special delight in burning churches, in putting human life to the sword right in the churches, and in selling monks into slavery. These depraved people even sold into North African slavery the raided daughters of nearby antagonistic Vikings. A contemporary's words give us a graphic impression of their carnage in "Christian" Europe:

The Northmen cease not to slay and carry into captivity the Christian people, to destroy the churches and to burn the towns. Everywhere, there is nothing but dead bodies—clergy and laymen, nobles and common people, women and children. There is no road or place where the ground is not covered with corpses. We live in distress

and anguish before this spectacle of the destruction of the Christian people.<sup>2</sup>

No wonder the Anglican prayer book contains the prayer, "From the fury of the Northmen, O Lord, deliver us." Once more, when Christians did not reach out to them, pagan peoples came after what the Christians possessed. And once more, the phenomenal power of Christianity manifested itself: the conquerors became conquered by the faith of their captives.

Usually it was the monks sold as slaves or Christian girls forced to be their wives and mistresses who eventually won these savages of the north. In

And once more, the phenomenal power of Christianity manifested itself: the conquerors became conquered by the faith of their captives.

God's providence their redemption became more important than the harrowing tragedy of this new invasion of barbarian violence and evil which fell upon God's own people whom He loved. After all, He spared not His own Son in order to redeem us! Thus, again, what Satan intended for evil, God used for good.

In the previous hundred years, Charlemagne's scholars had carefully collected the manuscripts of the ancient world. Now the majority were to be burned by the Vikings. Only because so many copies had been made and scattered so widely did the fruits of the Charlemagnic literary revival survive at all. Once scholars and missionaries had streamed in peace from Ireland across England and onto the continent, and even out beyond the frontiers of Charlemagne's empire. Under the brunt of these new violent invasions from the north, the Irish volcano which had poured forth a passionate fire of evangelism for three centuries cooled almost to extinction. Viking warriors, newly based in Ireland, followed the paths of the earlier Irish peregrini across England and onto the continent, but this time ploughing waste and destruction rather than new life and hope.



There were some blessings in this horrifying disguise. Alfred the Great, a tribal chieftain ("king") of Wessex, successfully headed up guerrilla resistance and was equally concerned about spiritual as well as physical losses. As a measure of emergency, he gave up the ideal of maintaining the Latin tongue as a general pattern for worship and began a Christian library in the vernacular—the Anglo-Saxon. This was a decision of monumental importance which might have been delayed several centuries had the tragedy of the Vikings not provided the necessity which was the mother of this invention.

In any case, as Christopher Dawson puts it, the unparalleled devastation of England and the Continent was "not a victory for paganism." The Northmen who landed on the Continent under Rollo became the Christianized Normans, and the Danish who took over a huge section of middle England (along with invaders from Norway who planted their own kind in many other parts of England and Ireland) also were soon to become Christians. The gospel was too powerful. One result was that a new Christian culture spread back into Scandinavia. This stemmed largely from England from which came the first monastic communities and early missionary bishops. What England lost, Scandinavia gained.

It must also be admitted that the Vikings would not have been attracted either to the churches or to the monasteries had not those centers of Christian piety to a great extent succumbed to luxury. The switch from the Irish to the Benedictine pattern of monasticism was an improvement in many respects, but apparently allowed greater possibilities for the development of an unchristian opulence and glitter which attracted the greedy eyes of the Norsemen. Thus, another side-benefit of the new invasions was their indirect cleansing and refinement of the Christian movement. Even before the Vikings appeared, Benedict of Aniane inspired a rustle of reform here and there. By 910, at Cluny, a novel and significant step forward was begun. Among other changes, the authority over a monastic center was shifted away from local politics, and for the first time beyond anything previous whole networks of "daughter" houses arose which were related to a single, strongly spiritual

"mother" house. The Cluny revival, moreover, produced a new reforming attitude toward society as a whole.

The greatest bishop in Rome in the first millennium, Gregory I, was the product of a Benedictine community. So also, early in the second millennium, Hildebrand was a product of the Cluny reform. His successors in reform were bolstered greatly by the Cistercian revival which went even further. Working behind the scenes for many years for wholesale reform across the entire church, he finally became Pope Gregory VII for a relatively brief period. But his reforming zeal set the stage for Pope Innocent III, who wielded greater power (and all things considered, greater power for good) than any other Pope before or since. Gregory VII had made a decisive step toward wresting control of the church from secular power—this was the question of "lay investiture." It was he who allowed Henry IV to wait for three days out in the snow at Canossa. Innocent III not only carried forward Gregory's reforms, but had the distinction of being the Pope who authorized the first of a whole new series of mobile mission orders—the Friars.

Our First Period ended with a barely Christian Roman Empire and a somewhat Christian emperor—Constantine. Our second period ended with a reconstitution of that empire under a Christianized barbarian, Charlemagne, who was devoutly and vigorously Christian. Can you imagine an emperor who wore a monk's habit? Our third period ends with a pope, Innocent III, as the strongest man in Europe, made strong by the Cluny, Cistercian and allied spiritual movements which together are called the Gregorian Reform. The scene was now an enlarged Europe in which no secular ruler could survive without at least tipping his hat to the leaders in the Christian movement. It was a period in which European Christians had not reached out in missions, but they had at least with phenomenal speed grafted in the entire northern area, and had also deepened the foundations of Christian scholarship and devotion passed on from the Europe of Charlemagne.

The next period would unfold some happy and unhappy surprises. Would Eu-



rope now take the initiative in reaching out with the Gospel? Would it sink in self-satisfaction? In some respects it would do both.

#### Period IV: Winning the Saracens? A.D. 1200–1600

The fourth period began with a spectacular, new evangelistic instrument—the Friars—and after the disaster of the prolonged plague would end with the greatest, the most vital, and most disruptive reformation of all. However, the Christian movement had already been involved for a hundred years in the most massive and tragic misconstrual of Christian mission in all of history. Ironically, part of the “flourishing” of the faith toward the end of the previous period led to disaster: never before had any nation or group of nations in the name of Christ launched as energetic and sustained a campaign into foreign territory as did Europe in the tragic debacle of the Crusades. This was in part the carry-over of the Viking spirit into the Christian Church. All of the major Crusades were led by Viking descendants.

While the Crusades had many political overtones (they were often a unifying device for faltering rulers), they would not have happened without the vigorous but misguided sponsorship of Christian leaders. They were not only an unprecedented blood-letting to the Europeans themselves and a savage wound in the side of the Muslim peoples (a wound which is not healed to this day), but they were a fatal blow even to the cause of Greek/Latin Christian unity and to the cultural unity of eastern Europe. In the long run, though Western Christians held Jerusalem for a hundred years, the Crusaders by default eventually gave the Eastern Christians over to the Ottoman sultans. Far worse, they established a permanent image of brutal, militant Christianity that alienates a large proportion of mankind, tearing down the value of the very word *Christian* in missions to this day.

Ironically, the mission of the Crusaders would not have been so appallingly negative had it not involved so high a component of abject Christian commitment. The great lesson of the Crusades is that goodwill, even sacrificial obedience to God, is no substitute for a clear understanding of His will. Significant in

this sorry movement was an authentically devout man, Bernard of Clairvaux, to whom are attributed the words of the hymn *Jesus the Very Thought of Thee*. He preached the first crusade. Two Franciscans, Francis of Assisi and Raymond Lull, stand out as the only ones in this period whose insight into God’s will led them to substitute for warfare and violence the gentle words of the evangel as the proper means of extending the blessing God conferred on Abraham and had always intended for all of Abraham’s children-of-faith.

At this point we must pause to reflect on this curious period. We may not succeed, but let us try to see things from God’s point of view, treading with caution and tentativeness. We know, for example, that at the end of the First Period after three centuries of hardship and persecution, just when things were apparently going great, invaders appeared and chaos and catastrophe ensued. Why? That followed the period we have called the “Classical Renaissance.” It was both good and not so good. Just when Christians were translating the Bible into Latin and waxing eloquent in theological debate, when Eusebius, as the government’s official historian, was editing a massive collection of previous Christian writings, when heretics were thrown out of the empire (and became, however reluctantly, the only missionaries to the Goths), when Rome finally became officially Christian... then suddenly the curtain came down. Now, out of chaos God would bring a new cluster of people groups to be included in the “blessing,” that is, to be confronted with the claims, privileges, and obligations of the expanding Kingdom of God.

Similarly, at the end of the Second Period, after three centuries of chaos during which the rampaging Gothic hordes were eventually Christianized, tamed and civilized, Bibles and biblical knowledge proliferated as never before. Major biblical-missionary centers were established by the Celtic Christians and their Anglo-Saxon pupils. In this Charlemagnic (actually “Carolingian”) renaissance, thousands of public schools led by Christians attempted mass biblical and general literacy. Charlemagne dared even to attack the endemic use of alcohol. Great theologians tussled with theological/political



issues, The Venerable Bede became the Eusebius of this period (indeed, when both Charlemagne and Bede were much more Christian than Constantine and Eusebius). And, once again, invaders appeared and chaos and catastrophe ensued. Why?

Strangely similar, then, is the third period. In its early part it only took two and a half centuries for the Vikings to capitulate to the “counterattack of the Gospel.” The “renaissance” ensuing toward the end of this period was longer than a century and far more extensive than ever before. The Crusades, the cathedrals, the so-called Scholastic theologians, the universities, most importantly the blessed Friars, and even the early part of the Humanistic Renaissance make up this outsized 1050-1350 outburst of a Medieval Renaissance, or the “Twelfth Century Renaissance.” But then suddenly a new invader appeared—the Black plague—more virulent than ever, and chaos and catastrophe greater than ever occurred. Why?

Was God dissatisfied with incomplete obedience? Or was Satan striking back each time in greater desperation? Were those with the blessing retaining it and not sufficiently and determinedly sharing it with the other nations of the world? More puzzling, the plague that killed one-third of the inhabitants of Europe killed a much higher proportion of the Franciscans: 120,000 were laid still in Germany alone. Surely God was not trying to judge their missionary fire. Was He trying to judge the Crusaders whose atrocities greatly outweighed the Christian devotional elements in their movement? If so, why did He wait several hundred years to do that? Surely Satan, not God, inflicted Christian leadership in Europe so greatly. Would not Satan rather have that happen than for the Crusaders to die of the plague?

Perhaps it was that Europe did not sufficiently listen to the saintly Friars; that it was not the Friars that went wrong, but the hearers who did not respond. God’s judgment upon Europe then might have been to take the Gospel away from them, to take away the Friars and their message. Even though to us it seems like it was a judgment upon the messengers rather than upon the resistant hearers, is this not one impression that could be received from the New Testament as well?

Jesus Himself came unto His own, and His own received Him not, yet Jesus rather than the resisting people went to the cross. Perhaps Satan’s evil intent—of removing the messenger—God employed as a judgment against those who chose not to hear.

In any case, the invasion of the Bubonic plague, first in 1346 and every so often during the next decade, brought a greater setback than the Gothic, the Anglo-Saxon or the Viking invasions. It first devastated parts of Italy and Spain, then spread west and north to France, England, Holland, Germany and Scandinavia. By the time it had run its course 40 years later, one third to one half of the population of Europe was dead. Especially stricken were the Friars and the truly spiritual leaders. They were the ones who stayed behind to tend the sick and to bury the dead. Europe was absolutely in ruins. The result? There were three rival Popes at one point, the humanist elements turned menacingly humanistic, peasant turmoil (often based in justice and even justified by the Bible itself) turned into orgies and excesses of violence. “The god of this world” must have been glad, but out of all that death, poverty, confusion and lengthy travail, God birthed a new reform greater than anything before it.

Once more, at the end of one of our periods, a great flourishing took place. Printing came to the fore, Europeans finally escaped from their geographical cul de sac and sent ships for commerce, subjugation and spiritual blessing to the very ends of the earth. And as a part of the reform, the Protestant Reformation now loomed on the horizon: that great, seemingly permanent, cultural decentralization of Europe.

Protestants often think of the Reformation as a legitimate reaction against the evils of a monstrous Christian bureaucracy sunken in decadence and corruption. But it must be admitted that this re-formation was much more than that. This great decentralization of Christendom was in many respects the result of an increasing vitality which—although this is unknown to most Protestants—was just as evident in Italy, Spain and France as in Moravia, Germany and England. Everywhere we see a return to a study of the Bible and the appearance of new life and evangelical



preaching. The Gospel encouraged believers to be German, not merely permitted Germans to be Roman Christians. Nevertheless, that marvelous insight was one of the products of a renewal already in progress. (Luther produced not the *first* but the *fourteenth* translation of the Bible into German.) Unfortunately, the marvelous emphasis on justification by faith—which was preached as much in Italy and Spain as in Germany at the time Luther loomed into view—became identified and ensnared with German nationalistic (separatist) hopes and was thus, understandably, suppressed as a dangerous doctrine by political powers in Southern Europe.

It is merely a typical Protestant misunderstanding that there was not as much a revival of deeper life, Bible study and prayer in Southern Europe as in Northern Europe at the time of the Reformation. The issue may have appeared to the Protestants as faith vs. law, or to the Romans as unity vs. division, but such popular scales are askew because it was much more a case of over reaching Latin uniformity vs. national and indigenous diversity. The vernacular had to eventually conquer.

While Paul had not demanded that the Greeks become Jews, nevertheless the Germans had been obliged to become Roman. The Anglo-Saxons and the Scandinavians had at least been allowed their vernacular to an extent unknown in Christian Germany. Germany was where the revolt then reasonably took place. Italy, France, and Spain, which were formerly part of the Roman Empire and extensively assimilated culturally in that direction, had no equivalent nationalistic steam behind their reforming movements and thus became almost irrelevant in the political polarity of the scuffle that ensued.

However—here we go again—despite the fact that the Protestants won on the political front, and to a great extent gained the power to formulate anew their own Christian tradition and certainly thought they took the Bible seriously, they did not even talk of mission outreach. Rather, the period ended with *Roman* Europe expanding both politically and religiously on the seven seas. Thus, entirely unshared by Protestants for at least two centuries, the Catholic variety of Christianity actively promoted and accompanied a world-

wide movement of scope unprecedented in the annals of mankind, one in which there was greater Christian missionary awareness than ever before. But, having lost non-Roman Europe by insisting on its Mediterranean culture, the Catholic tradition would now try to win the rest of the world without fully understanding what had just happened.

But why did the Protestants not even try to reach out? Catholic missionaries for two hundred years preceded Protestant missionaries. Some scholars point to the fact that the Protestants did not have a global network of colonial outreach. Well, the Dutch Protestants did. And, their ships, unlike those from Catholic countries, carried no missionaries. This is why the Japanese—once they began to fear the Christian movement Catholic missionaries planted—would allow only Dutch ships into their ports. Indeed, the Dutch even cheered and assisted the Japanese in the slaughter of the budding Christian (Catholic) community.

### **Period V: To the Ends of the Earth, A.D. 1600–2000**

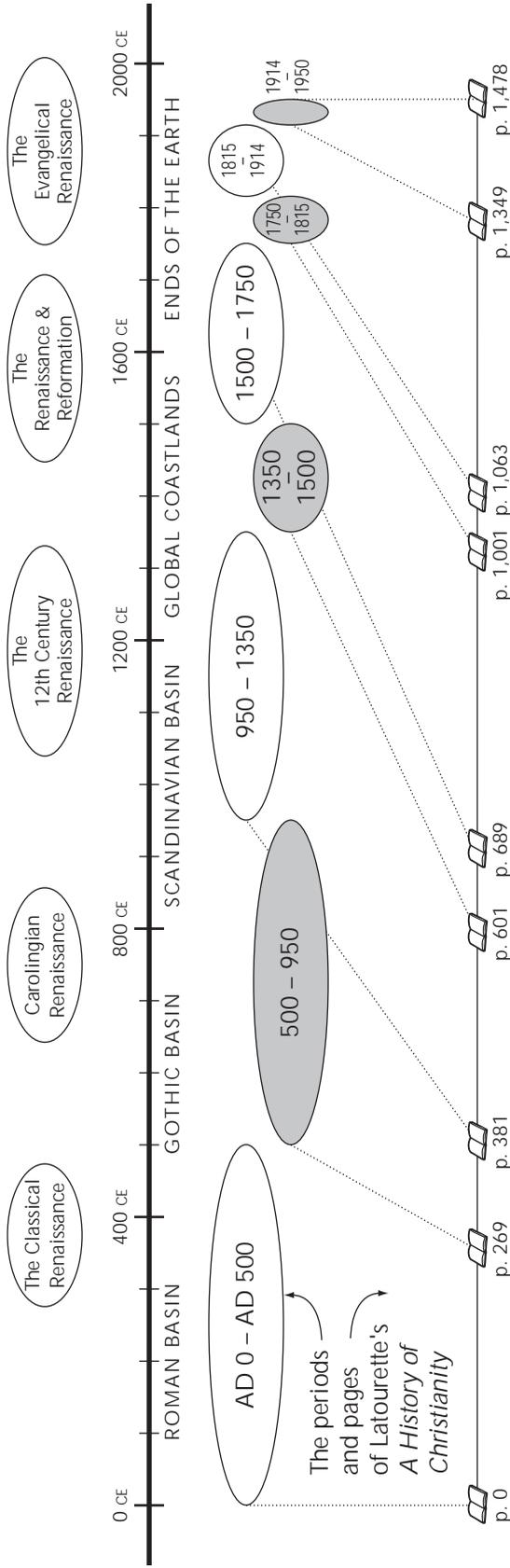
The period from 1600 to 2000 began with European footholds in the rest of the world. Apart from taking over what was relatively an empty continent by toppling the Aztec and Inca empires in the Western hemisphere, Europeans had only tiny enclaves of power in the heavily populated portions of the rest of the non-Western world. By 1945, Europeans had achieved virtual control over 99.5% of the non-Western world. This would not last. The peoples inhabiting the colonial empires had grown significantly in knowledge and initiative, just as the Goths had grown strong outside the bounds of the Roman empire. The Second World War mightily distracted the Western nations from their colonial hold on the rest of the world. That did it. Nationalism exploded.

Twenty-five years later, the Western nations had lost control over all but 5% of the non-Western population of the world. This 1945–1969 period of the sudden collapse of Western control, coupled with the unexpected upsurge of significance of the Christian movement in the non-Western world, I have elsewhere called “the twenty-five unbelievable years.” If we compare this period to the collapse of the



# Pulses in Western Civilization

As the faith moved in to each new cultural basin it struggled before gaining acceptance in a flourishing period which scholars have called a "Renaissance."



## Renaissance in Five Epochs

The dark-lined upper grid of 400-year "epochs" is designed to be easy to remember not to determine the reality of history. However, the most significant expansions of the Christian faith are reflected at least roughly in this way. More importantly, the existence of five "renaissances" is also highlighted.

The lower line represents the pages Latourette devotes to the timeline above. The unshaded ovals represent what do.

Latourette calls "Resurgences" of Christianity, while the shaded ovals represent "Recessions."

The most important thing revealed by this comparison is the fact that all four of Latourette's "Resurgences" correspond to the "Renaissances" of the upper timeline. The only significant difference is that he does not honor the Carolingian Renaissance to the extent many other scholars do.

One reason Latourette saw this differently is that he was concerned strictly with what is called "Christianity" (which is not illogical in a book entitled *A History of Christianity*) and thus does not consider the Islamic movement a largely positive expression of the same "Judaic" tradition.

In any case, Islam, although starting later, became an advance far more illustrious than our Western upbringing normally allows us to realize. By the time of

the Renaissance in fourth epoch, Islam had become politically, culturally, militarily, and even numerically, superior to "Christianity." In many ways this had been true for more than half of the Christian period. This is not surprising since much of the expansion of Islam built on a Christian substratum, just as Christianity had earlier built on Jewish a substratum.



Western Roman Empire's domination over its conquered provinces of Spain, Gaul and Britain, and to the breakdown of control over non-Frankish Europe under Charlemagne's successors, we might anticipate—at least by the logic of sheer parallelism—that the Western world itself will soon be significantly dominated by non-Westerners.

With some reason, ever since the collapse of Western power became obvious (during “the twenty-five unbelievable years”), there have been many who have decried the thought of any further missionary effort moving from the West to the non-Western world. Perhaps they have confused the inappropriateness of political control with a need to cut ties of faith in any further foreign missions.

The true situation is actually very different. In fact, the absence of political control for the first time in many areas has now begun to allow non-Western populations to yield to the Kingdom of Christ without simultaneously yielding to the political kingdoms of the Western world. Here we see a parallel to the Frankish tribal people accepting the faith of Rome only after Rome had lost its military power. This new openness to Catholic Christianity continued among the Anglo-Saxons, Germans and Scandinavians up until the time when the emergence of strong papal authority, mixed with power politics, became a threat to legitimate national ambitions, and led to a Reformation which allowed nationalized forms of Christianity to break away.

The present spectacle of a Western world flaunting the standards of Christian morality in more obvious ways than ever may dissuade non-Christian nations from embracing the Christian faith; but it may also tend to disassociate the treasure of Christian ideals from a Western world which has, until this age, been their most prominent sponsor. When Asians accuse Western nations of immorality in warfare, they are appealing to Christian values, certainly not the values of any nation's pagan past. In this sense, Christianity has already

conquered the world. No longer, for example, is the long-standing Chinese tradition of ingenious torture likely to be boasted about in China nor highly respected anywhere else, at least in public circles.

But this worldwide transformation has not come about suddenly. Even the present, minimal attainment of worldwide Christian morality on a tenuous public level has been accomplished only at the cost of a great amount of sacrificial missionary endeavor (during the four centuries of Period Five), missionary labors which have been mightier and more deliberate than at any time in 2,000 years. The first half (1600-1800) of this fifth period was al-

There will be the defeat of Satan's power holding millions of people hostage in thousands of peoples—peoples which have too long “sat in darkness” and who “shall see a great light” (Matt 4:16).

most exclusively a Roman show. By the year 1800 it was painfully embarrassing to Protestants to hear Roman missionaries writing off the Protestant movement as apostate simply because it was not sending missionaries. But by that same year, Roman missionary effort had been forced into sudden decline due to the curtailment of the Jesuits, and the combined effect of the French Revolution and ensuing chaos which then cut the European economic roots of Catholic missions.

However, the year 1800 marks the awakening of the Protestants from two-and-a-half centuries of inactivity, if not theological slumber, in regard to missionary outreach across the world. The 1800 to 2000 year period is treated in the chapter “Four Men, Three Eras, Two Transitions: Modern Missions.” During this final period, for the first time, Protestants equipped themselves with organizational structures of mission comparable to the Catholic orders and began to make up for lost time. Unheralded, unnoticed, and all but forgotten in our day except for ill-informed criticism, Protestant missionary efforts in this period, more than Catholic missions, led the way in establishing throughout the world the democratic apparatus of government, the schools, the hospitals, the universities and the political foundations of the new nations. Rightly understood, Protestant missionaries,



along with their Roman Catholic counterparts, are surely not less than the prime movers of the tremendous energy that is mushrooming in the Third World today. Take China, for example. Two of its greatest modern leaders, Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek, were both Christians. Teng Hsiao-P'ing's "Four Modernizations" were principal emphases of the Western mission movement in China. Missions had planted a university in every province of China, etc.

But, if the Western home base is now to falter and to fail as the tide is reversed through the rising power of its partially evangelized periphery (as is the pattern in the earlier periods), we can only refer to Dawson's comment on the devastation wrought by the Vikings—that this will not be a "victory for paganism." The fall of the West will, in that case, be due in part to a decay of spirit. It will also be due to the pagan power in the non-Western world emboldened and strengthened by its first contact with Christian faith. It may come as a most drastic punishment to a Western world that has always spent more on cosmetics than it has on foreign missions—and lately ten times as much.

From a secular or even nationalistic point of view, the next years may be a very dark period for the Western world. The normal hopes and aspirations of Christian people for their own country may find only a very slight basis for optimism. But if the past is any guide at all, even this will have to be darkness before the dawn. The entire Western world in its present political form may be radically altered. We may not even be sure about the survival of our own country. But

we have every reason to suppose from past experience that the Christian, biblical faith will clearly survive in one form or another.

We can readily calculate that during the 20th century, Westerners dropped from 18% to 8% of the world population. But we cannot ultimately be pessimistic. Beyond the agony of Rome was the winning of the Barbarians. Beyond the agony of the Barbarians was the winning of the Vikings. Beyond the agony of the Western world we can only pray that there will be the defeat of Satan's power holding millions of people hostage in thousands of peoples—peoples which have too long "sat in darkness" and who "shall see a great light" (Matt 4:16). And we can know that there is no basis in the past or in the present for assuming that things are out of the control of the Living God.

If we in the West insist on keeping our blessing instead of sharing it, then we will, like other nations before us, have to lose our blessing for the remaining nations to receive it. God has not changed His plan in the last 4,000 years. But how much better not to focus on how to retain but to strive intentionally to extend that marvelous "blessing"! That way "in you and in your descendants all of the peoples of the world will be blessed." This is the only way we can continue in God's blessing. The expanding Kingdom is not going to stop with us (although it may leave us behind). "This Gospel of the Kingdom must be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all peoples, and then shall the end come" (Matt 24:14). God can raise up others if we falter. Indeed, the rest of this book indicates that is already happening.

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## End Notes

1. Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points, Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997), p. 84.
2. Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture*, (New York: Image Books, 1991), p. 87.

## Study Questions

1. Illustrate this thesis: "The conferring of the blessing brings sober responsibility, dangerous if unfulfilled."
2. Explain the cultural and social dynamics behind the Protestant Reformation.
3. Winter contends that history is a "single, coherent drama." What are the outlines of the "plot"? What themes are repeated? What major lessons are to be observed?

