



# Chronicles of Diversity

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## Thesis 7; Indulgences

A little over one hundred years ago the German Max Weber published his most popular essay: "The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism." This essay is available online at <http://xroads.virginia.edu/-HYPER/WEBER/header.html>. While we will not really delve into this work, in summary he said that the Calvinist view of predestination coupled with Luther's concept of a vocational calling, was the basis for the rise of what we could call western capitalism.

Weber also wrote similar essays dealing with the religions of China, India, and ancient Judaism. I suppose a hundred years ago, the influences of Islam was not that significant, perhaps it was on his to do list when he died, but even without his thoughts on the subject, today what we are facing on the world stage is not so much the clash of ideas, but the clash of man's religious world views. Therein lies the weakness of our modern atheistic evolution of capitalism,

that man is not a created religious being. As prophesied, allegorically described, written as a parable, or just a short work of fiction, last week's tale of Plaid Jodi Hood, Tall and Strong, should demonstrate that this error of irreligious intellectualism may well lead to the destruction of the economic world as we know it.

That atheism of communism, Marxism, and socialism, led to the fall of the Soviet Union, is a strong influence in the economic stagnation of Europe, and will have similar impacts upon all countries that walk in their own self righteousness. That is true in history, and its truth shall remain until the end of time. No matter how it is spun, man was created in the image of God, and will pursue a restoration of the created unity no matter what happens within the world's universe of enterprise, knowledge, and wisdom. I didn't hear anything about the Shroud of Turin during the recent



Olympic games, but once the glamor of the competitions has waned many years, discussions as to whether this artifact is in truth the burial robe of Christ will again become one of the main attractions of the city. It has been and will remain, whether the shroud is authentic or not, the city's Godly connection.

Exploring his created eternal soul, man has always striven to deal with the concept of eternity that infuses his very being. Martin Luther's 95 Thesis, were not penned to start the Reformation, they were written to call into question the ability to economically buy an eternal soul out of purgatory by making a contribution to the church. The bigger one's God given responsibility, the greater the price of that indulgence. To make the matter all more relevant to this world, that gift might also bestow upon the benefactor some wonderful relic, a few which may have been historically genuine idols, but most were obvious deceptions.

Much of this, by its very essence, revolves around what Weber calls Luther's concept of the calling. In order to show the fallacy of such an indulgent practice of devotion, there must be a worthy substitute to bring God glory. That contrast of working to buy something to give to the church to bring her glory, is contrasted by the eternal purpose is found in one's God given work or vocation, whatever that might be. What a tremendous, simple concept. A monk, can show glory to God, by being the best monk he can be. A cobbler can show glory to God by using his shoe making talents to make excellent shoes. A journalist can bring God glory by truthfully reporting the news. And Jodi Hood can give glory to God by developing her basketball talents to the best of her ability.

Add a little Calvinist predestination to the mix and you have the Protestant Work Ethic. Mix that all up in a boiling caldron of aggressive greed, add a sprinkling of magic dust, let it naturally ferment for a few centuries, and presto change o you have our modern world dominating western culture. We are the free trade model of the world and the religious anathema of all other religious cultures. Want to spin it in a more evangelical, neocon, Arminian, revivalist, pot,

and you end up with the same world wide result, but just a more striking contrast among fundamentalist religious cultures.

The problem with tremendous, simple concepts, is when they move from the laboratory to the real world, or shall we say from the cloister to the street. We are all by definition uniquely gifted by God to perform a certain series of tasks with greater skills and talents than anyone else. The problem is that no one wants to pay us for our gifts unless they fit within the worldly capitalistic economic model. Our for money job, at best may only be partially related to our calling or vocation. Consequently, unless we are descendants of those rich Protestant capitalists with capital and access to capital, we must many times work for money at the expense of our desire to fulfill God's glory in our calling or vocation.

Depending upon the denomination, most pastors never had a real job, or are removed as many years as possible from this bane of personal dichotomy. Of course when you are as blessed as I have been, everyplace I have ever worked for some time, has always been portrayed as an allegory of real capitalism. "What you do here is not the real world, but if you get a job in the real world, you will see just why we stay here and cry, bitch, and moan about our situation."

Such an attitude is really an indulgence of not wanting to deal with true reality. The pre Reformation slogan, "A coin in the coffer rings, a soul from purgatory springs." is really just a now personalized concept for the modern weekend. We commit our time to our job, in exchange for a few coins, then Friday afternoon we are freed to do what we really enjoy doing or catch up with the life which had to cease because of work requirements. Unless of course we are so bummed out by the week that we use the time to drown our sorrows in any number of capitalistic diversions. This of course just gives us enough sense of self worth to come back Monday morning for another week of servitude. After 30 years in this rut we can retire and enjoy ourselves. Provided of course, sitting on our obese butt all those years has not given us heart disease, diabetes, or other debilitating ailment.

Indulgences, of the Reformation type, or our modern type, are really just another form of gambling. We are really gambling our present gifts,

with the hope of a future pay out at the expense of others. Over time, personal integrity is sacrificed upon the altar of monetary security, for ourselves, our family, our friends, and most importantly our God given calling. That ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, is why last week's Plaid Jodi Hood, may ultimately turn out to be too mellow of a future procrastination.

I just read that one 12 kiloton nuclear device, similar to what the United States used on Japan, detonated at Brooklyn's Redhook Terminal could kill 2 million people, devastate the economy, and change the nature of free society in the United States and around the world. All this havoc brought about by the west's indulgence of the self, at the expense of others less wealthy, or others who's religions we mock.

Western capitalism has evolved to such a state that we can tolerate Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist, workers if they will work for one tenth what we would have to pay our own people. All this so we can market aspirations to some ghetto kid that with a pair of 100 sneakers and a dream he can be the next Yvonne James. That lie is just as prevalent in South Seattle as it is in the ghetto of Mercer Island, or the reservation isolation of Inchelium. What is missing that no one tells the prospective star is the amount of natural gifts, discipline, intelligence, and work required to be a team player rather than an individual showboat. Natural gifts require good coaching, mentors, and other gifted team members to be successful.

Contrary to television advertisements, team work is really an oxymoron in modern corporations, because all fundamentals have basically degenerated into monetary profit as the greatest corporate good, not the glory of God. The global corporation has replaced the nation state as the feudal rulers of the world and to the extent corporately possible, employees are best treated as serfs. Multinational corporations keep national governments around to meagerly supply social services, but they are limited to the extent that business taxes don't greatly interfere with corporate profits. This is a very different economic model than those operated by Scotch Presbyterian entrepreneurs of the 19th century, but at the same time it is really just an adapting of the model of economies of scale. What has

been genetically engineered out of the Protestant model however, is the restraint of inefficient and outmoded religious myths and practices.

Revolutions and Reformations are interesting world phenomena. They come about when individuals either by choice or enforced circumstance begin to cash in their indulgences and opt out of the status quo game. Few people have the guts to make that choice, but once the indulgence cord is broken by circumstances, people are quick to realize that life is too short to gamble away their time in this world for a few years at the end. The only true security in the world comes from God, according to His will, and everything else is stuff that most of the time is in the way.

As more and more people move or are forced outside the establishment, true change can take place. Just as we are created as religious personalities, so too are we created as community members. The glue that holds those communities together is shared religious faith and/or truth. Only Christianity, of all the world's religions, has that truth to share with the rest of the world. The problem is that most of Christianity is only interested in sharing its vision in terms of religious world views. "I don't smoke, I don't chew, and I don't go with girls that do, but at least I marry girls."

Most people, outside the church, are not hostile to the true Christian message, they just have never heard the truth, because our modern evangelical worldly religious desires get in the way of the gospel. Our eternal conscious gives us all a sense of right and wrong. We may spin it slightly differently, or a few may reject it entirely, but the differences in all religions are really quite minor compared to the diversity of all humanity. From this concept develops the misconception that all roads lead to God and an eternity in heaven. This is part of humanity's common grace heritage.

True Christianity however, is a revolutionary concept that is unique. The righteousness of Jesus the Christ, restores man's broken fellowship with God in the present and also in the eternal. Therefore, present reality with its hardships has been overcome by the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus, and thus brings God's eternal holiness into play, into all those who believe on him even in this world. That is what the concept of being born again is all about.

Christianity is not whether the United States will adopt a pro marriage constitutional amendment. A true Christian nation that such evangelicals seek to establish, would not need such an amendment, if the church truly proclaimed the gospel rather than a set of worldly religious morals.

Therefore, the nature of this world is that mankind will over time turn the calling and the work of God into some type of indulgence as a means to feel secure in this world of limited time and insecurity. This is true in Christianity through the rise of the institutional church until the Reformation, as it is true during the rise of western capitalism. Similar experiences do and have occurred in all of man's religious endeavors. At times, these acts come into conflict with other factions, or sects within the religion, as well as with conflicts with other religions. Examples in this present time are so numerous it seems almost silly to try and list them, except for the death, destruction, and stupendous changes this turmoil ferments. Add to this pressure cooker, natural changes of increasing frequency and depth, and it should give all humanity cause to ask why is this happening.

Acts of God and acts of men, force all to look to the nature of their ways. To some they will amend their travail, others will see this as a verification of their divine rights. Only true historic orthodox Christianity has the gift to rise through the turmoil and proclaim a message of hope, present and eternal in the midst of all that may occur. No religion of man can do that. This is how during all times of despair and plenty that Jesus Christ has built His church, and not even the gates of Hell will prevail against it. That hope and promise is the gift that allows the church to grow and to prosper as indulgences and our gambling with the future, are swept away in the floods of stupendous change.

We live in such a time, our choice is to embrace these changes and walk the secure path that God alone can provide through Jesus Christ, or to see it all swept away and we are left hopeless. Then we shall be forced again to see if we can get it right or at least better. Better still is to take these stupendous changes as a warning,

and perceive the path that God will prepare through the wilderness of worldly turmoil. The eternal truth of eternity created in our hearts is that only God holds the future, not man in all his intellect and charm.

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