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Why Me? Integrity

Today we continue our Novel Novel tour through history into the sixteenth century and what is known in western culture as the Reformation. According to the current outline we are now half way through our “Why Me?” series and are continuing the theme established last week in which God reboots the Judeo Christian culture about every five hundred years. Might one speculate if five hundred years to be the general length of any now extinct culture that may have prospered before its historic death?

Be that as it may, with the invention of the movable metal type printing press in 1440 by German Johannes Gutenberg, we now have for the first time in this series a written history of the continuing development of European culture in which books, pamphlets, and handbills can be widely distributed to a least the literate classes. This miraculous dissemination of information

provided the technological and energetic basis for Martin Luther and other reformers to get their message out into the world.

So really what was that message?

That message essentially focused on the reality that the Roman Catholic Church had forfeited its integrity in matters concerning both the temporal and the eternal world. Today we see a similar lack of moral and ethical virtue in the general or common perceptions of people toward both formal religion and also atheistic materialism. Just as with the Reformation Roman church it is perceived that all leadership is focused on temporal wealth and power rather than on either the people themselves or their eternal destiny.

While the peasants and serfs of medieval Europe were much more concerned with daily survival, humans, being human, always require a belief that our daily struggles and aspirations



will one day receive a personal reward. This concept can only come from our soul created in the image of God. Any attempt by any worldly power to corrupt that hope, desire, or pilgrimage will eventually lose the integrity it needs to continue to rule, reign, or even exist.

Today in the United States the TEA Party movement has been classified not as grassroots but rather Astroturf, or other pejorative terms. It has been dismissed as hyper conservative primitive kooks who are not smart enough to understand the complex workings of the modern global culture. The list of derogatory prose is long and diverse, and essentially misses the point that the TEA Party reformation is actually a much more fundamental expression of human humanity than the simplistic unethical models the contemporary elite can comprehend. As such, attempts to categorize or pigeonhole TEA Party people portrays a lack of intellectual honesty among those who demean this God given understanding of human dignity and freedom. In short the leaders of twenty first century America and their cronies, lack the common sense required to understand the historic universal reality of human common sense.

Martin Luther in his nailing of 95 Theses on the door of Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany on October 31, 1517 generally is used as the day the Protestant Reformation began. This posting was really just a public disclosure of 95 discussion questions regarding the church and the sale of indulgences that Luther hoped could be debated among the local learned clergy and students. That bulletin board type of disclosure was then printed by others and sent throughout Germany and to the pope.

Of course Luther was following in earlier church reformation steps of John Hus, John Wycliffe and others. By the sixteenth century, in the sale of indulgences to finance the construction of St. Peter's basilica in Rome, the critical mass of opposition to the Roman Church's lack of integrity surfaced throughout the Holy Roman Empire.

For modern Americans the writings of Luther are not a joy to read. His most popular, "Commentary on Romans," "Bondage of the

Will," and his "Small Catechism" seem to take for granted an understanding of sixteenth century Germany, that is totally foreign to American culture and which we have no inclination to learn. Lutheran theology is generally outlined in the "Book of Concord" which the Lutheran church first assembled in 1580. It too suffers from Lutheranese, but I understand there is recently a contemporary version available, which I have not seen.

Perhaps a question I was asked by a roommate on a religious retreat I took while in the Army in Germany can shed some light on this language conundrum: "What is the only beautiful word in the German language?" Dumfounded I could only proclaim I had no idea. The word is *zusammen*, meaning together. I recently learned that is also true in Yiddish.

I do not know if *zusammen* appears in any of Luther's writings, but in America that concept of we are all in this together seems still lost on Lutherans, hence the concept of Lutherans as "God's Frozen Chosen." There are a couple of very good movies on the life of Luther, which are available at Netflix as well as other venues, and they show that Luther's integrity was seriously tested in the hardships he endured.

The other Protestant reformer we will look at briefly in this episode is Jean or John Calvin. As we bring his work into the present, Calvinism *zusammen* with the antithesis of Calvinism, Arminianism, really form the basis for contemporary American Protestant Christianity. Calvin is much easier to read in English than Luther. I have read portions of his "Institutes of the Christian Religion" as well as portions of his biblical commentaries and if one would have the resolve to read all his works you would probably learn a great deal. Calvin also seemed to have a sense of humor for creating a pamphlet generally known as the "Inventory of Relics" in which he lists the various church relics that were available in his day, used as fund raisers to help the Roman church finance its role of promoting its temporal eternal nature.

The famous TULIP of Calvinism comes to us from the acronym, standing for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. The TULIP basically came into existence as

a rebuttal to the rise of what is now called Arminianism in the Reformed Church. Arminianism named for the teaching of Jacob Arminius. This dissention discussion took place at the Synod of Dort, which occurred in 1618 1619 in the Netherlands. The Dort results stated that if you did not strictly adhere to the TULIP you were by definition an Arminian.

Putting this dispute somewhat in context, Dort was a fight within Calvinism, hence had no bearing on the views of other Christian bodies, as did most historic, more catholic church councils. Therefore it somewhat illogically follows, that Arminians are an anathema of a different sort and totally distinct from Lutherans, even though Lutherans only share completely with Calvinists the Total Depravity Calvinist TULIP plank and redefine or refute totally the other points of Calvinism as they exist in Dort.

So when we bring this Calvinist Arminian split to England and the United States we find that not only did John Wesley define himself has an Arminian because he did not adhere to the TULIP's five points, he really came to his point of view through an overtly strident vein of Lutheran pietism, which formed the basis of much of his personal holiness theology.

So we are beginning to see the chaos that individual human freedom can cause on civilization and the opportunity for people to show their integrity in times of stupendous change. Lest we forget however, the Roman Catholic Church was forced to make some significant changes in its theology because of the Reformation also. Those reforms were codified by the Council of Trent 1545 1563, which declared all of Protestantism to be an anathema to the Church and Christianity.

The good that came from Trent is that the systematic theology of the Roman Catholic Church we see today basically remains true to these canons and decrees. This rooting in history can be seen as why many historic Protestants leave Protestantism because of a continuing emphasis, especially in evangelical, charismatic, Protestantism, to try to achieve a present evolving cultural relevance, absent any

historical Christian cultural link, except a desire to restore the vigor of the early church, sans their true commitment.

Coming back to our basic tenet this week we see, that all this turmoil was created by individuals willing to stand for the integrity of their religious beliefs no matter the personal costs. A book, "Foxe's Book of Martyrs" originally published in 1563, and updated frequently, outlines the lives of Christian martyrs from a historic and Protestant perspective. In our current age in which it is fashionable "not to stand for something," this book gives a perspective that is also now suppressed; "you shall fall for anything."

We now can look back at the Protestant Reformation as providing us the basis for all we in the western culture take for granted. Capitalism for all the good, bad, and sometimes ugly, flows out of nonconformist Scottish Presbyterianism, as well as the Protestant work ethic. John Locke 1632 1704, the English philosopher and physician was the son of Protestant Puritans, and his work greatly influenced the American Declaration of Independence, the American Republic and classical liberalism not the current collective antithesis. "Amazing Grace," the popular hymn was written by former slave trader John Newton an English clergyman in 1779 and best describes in music, the principles later codified in the U. S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

Do we today live in a time in which God is rebooting our culture?

It would be nice if the whole world would have a "Come to Jesus" moment, repent and then we would rapidly again ascent to our perception of a material heaven on earth, with God just serving our temporal desires. The Protestant Reformation was not anywhere close to that type of occurrence. Earlier we looked at some of the theological struggles that took place, but the physical conflicts really began early in the Reformation also.

It becomes important on what "re" words you might choose; that is why we can hope and pray for a reboot, rather than a reformation or a revolution. In the United States we still have our Constitutional basis for the country and this serves as the true intellectual foundation of the TEA Party phenomena. Therefore through God's amazing

grace, a reboot just might be possible. Other nations and peoples should learn to pray for that reboot also, because without a similar foundation based upon the common application of God's word, the American tenets of natural law and inalienable rights are generally not part of their political paradigms.

Actual Reformation troubles began in January 1521 at the Diet of Worms where Luther was called to recant his writings and teachings. This is where Luther uttered his most famous words "Here I stand; I can do no other. God help me. Amen" Hier stehe ich. Ich kann nicht Anders tun. Gott hilfe mir. Amen. On his return from Worms to Wittenberg, Luther was taken for exile to Wartburg Castle, from May until March 1522, where he translated the New Testament into German.

To summarize the next one hundred twenty six years 126 years , into one paragraph, there were continuing military conflicts ravaging all of Europe, as the Roman Catholic Church and their princes and rulers, fought against Protestant and Lutheran princes and rulers. Most of this violence consummated, if that could be considered a proper term, with the Thirty Years War. The devastation caused by these thirty years of conflict was probably similar to World War II in Europe except WWII only lasted from 1939 1945 with the actual Normandy landings taking place beginning June 6, 1944 and ended at various places in Germany in early May 1945.

When we hear about the Reformation today, it is generally spun in the religious and personal freedom it spawned as well as the broad spectrum of personal and economic opportunities; virtually nothing is discussed about the cost to bring it into fruition. Truly the world we know today would not exist without the seeds planted in the Reformation, and the natural fruit those seeds produced, that the whole of humanity enjoys today, not just western Europe and English speaking North America.

One of those fruits that remain is the broad understanding that integrity alone separates the saints from the dung. While the actual word root does not get us there, integrity can be thought of as inner grit that leads us along the difficult road, not for personal glory, but that inalienable truth transcends hardship and suffering.

In the last year the changes that have rapidly taken place in the United States, as we discussed last week, really isn't change we want to believe in, simply because it is too stupendous for our change desires to be slow and gradual, in which we control the outcomes. These now changes are really however, just a continuance of the entropy of the status quo.

Positive change requires both an increase not only in information but also the ability of that information to channel energetically new opportunities. The discussions in Washington DC and in the states today, is old school, centered in the entropy of the twentieth century. Will these twentieth century paradigms just run out of gas, or will they fight to the finish and take as many casualties they can take with them in the process. The Reformation seems to indicate the latter. But if you look at the contrast of the American Revolution with the French and the Russian Revolutions, you clearly see that Godly change is far superior to the human induced alternatives.

God, give us the blessing of your grace as we attempt to move forward with human common integrity. For here we stand and we can't do much about the outcome, so we must leave that in your hands. Amen.