CHRISTIANITY

THEN and NOW:

An Historical Primer

by

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**Introduction: This Book, Religion and Secularity**

This series of brief essays is intended to provide a concise, in-depth, historical account of the Christian religion as a religion—how it has grown and evolved under the leadership of a few heroic individuals as they have contended with their various challenging environments; how it has gradually ceased to grow and is radically declining under the conditions of modern Western secular culture; and at least tentatively how that might be remediated. The chapters began as separate individual *pièces des occasions*: annual historical sermons at St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church in Dover, Massachusetts. The first in 2016 celebrated St. Dunstan on our parish's 50th anniversary; then in 2017 on Luther for the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation; in 2018 on the 500th of the English Reformation, recognizing William Tyndale as its leader; and then in 2019 for good measure one on Richard Hooker, who defined Anglicanism, especially as an open and tolerant religion. Then in 2020, and quite by accident in an Adult Education program, we stumbled on the previously unnoticed fact that John's *Gospel* was written as a systematic rhetorical argument for the divinity of Jesus. That suggested a logical starting point for a continuous historical account filling in two gaps: between St. John and St. Dunstan, with connection through St. Augustine and the Christian millennium; and then between Hooker and our own day through early-modern secularization, which has been a longtime scholarly interest of mine, concluding with a prognosis of Christianity's prospects for the future in our own Age of Transformations.

This short book therefore accidentally came together as an unforeseen product, rather than something intended, of its various historical inquiries. Its chapters may also be considered guideposts along the way, marking a continuous trajectory illuminating Christianity's essential and enduring core values for reconsideration and possible revival.

This next point is essential: Our focus on the religious content of Christianity obviates a need to address derivative historical dimensions of a comprehensive history—in particular, the histories of the many betrayals of Christian values—e.g., in violence, racism, sexism, and other bigotries, also in personal failings—by people an institutions claiming falsely to be acting as Christians.

To be clear, my training was not in religious studies *per se*, but in Renaissance and Reformation history, which I professed with related subjects for nearly twenty years before entering professional philanthropy in the 1980s. In preparing these sermons as lectures and then chapters, I have of course reviewed recent scholarship, and while I found room for numerous original discoveries and interpretations, this short book is more for teaching than academic scholarship. Assertions are supported by evidence, but there are no scholarly footnotes nor explicit specification of all the original discoveries.

We begin with several key and basic definitions:

**Religion**: We follow Paul Tillich's existentialist conceptualization: "ultimate concern"—"the concern that qualifies all other concerns." Accordingly, we all—you and I and everyone—whatever we think of religion or of Christianity, nonetheless order our lives around commitments, or concerns. If we think about our lives today, we can identify our own guiding concerns—what objects, goals and values each of us pursues. Some are more influential in our lives than others—they qualify the others, in hierarchical fashion—which defines our characters, who each of us fundamentally is. We are committed to various people—family, friends, associates—to our institutions, to our jobs, careers, and statuses in life—to our various interests and hobbies, as well as to our patterns and habits of behavior.

Tillich pointed out that various concerns have characteristic capabilities of ordering our lives. Some are more powerful, and they subordinate others. However, if we raise a concern to a level higher than its competence to govern other concerns, it fails when it collides with them, causing problems. We might commit ourselves to the pursuit of wealth, only to discover that it can’t buy love; or to pleasure, only to discover that in some cases the pursuit of pleasure can bring disorder into our lives.

According to Tillich, “faith” is not just intellectual—i.e., accepting assertions for which there is no evidence—but existential: “belief”—not just ideas, but ideas lived by, values to which we commit our lives, and by which we define ourselves. One can have “faith” in science as well as “faith” in God.

**Secularity**: Raising a concern to a level higher than it is competent to order in practice, is according to

Tillich idolatry or secularity. Worshipping the Golden Calf, as it were, causes stress and disorder, ratherthan order, in our lives in the world. Secularity is therefore the antithesis and corrosive enemy of religion.

In contrast with secularity, authentic and true religion according to Tillich is the “ultimate concern”—a concern which objectively and in thought and practice qualifies all other concerns of a person or society. Tillich's language is broadly applicable but fundamentally Christian. The Judeo-Christian tradition began with the Ten Commandments, endorsed by Christ Himself: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (*Matt*.22:34-40) Thomas á Kempis, a late-medieval saint, in his *Imitation of Christ*, wrote: "The man to whom all things are one, who refers all things to one, who sees all things in one—he can be steadfast in heart and abide peacefully in God." In the 19th century Søren Kierkegaard wrote, “Purity of heart is to will one thing”, which he described as “The blessed state of the striving soul.” Sainthood or salvation is the holistic purity of soul in which all of a person's concerns are subordinated to, qualified by, the ultimate concern. Nature, accordingly, is sanctified. Tillich believed that the only practically competent ultimate concern is the Christian commitment to love God, the *Logos*.

**Christian, Christianity:** I use these terms broadly (as with Judaism, Islam, *et al.*) and intentionally so, to cover all the numerous branches, both Catholic and Protestant, that have proliferated from roots in the *New Testament* of the *Bible*. In other words, this book speaks from the point of view of the whole as an historical phenomenon, not any of its separate or distinct parts, and follows the distinction drawn by the English Reformation scholar Richard Hooker, between things that are "necessary" and those that are "indifferent" to "salvation"—i.e., the "love" of God. All these terms will be clarified below.

**Causation:** I define it as the "coincidence of conducive conditions" in time and place. To analyze what may have "caused" a given result requires identifying its conducive conditions that came together, the probabilities that were increased and the impediments that were transcended, and when, where and how the critical mass evoked the outcome. It follows that in the opposite direction, to cause something to happen, requires reverse engineering: the identification and piling up of potential conducives to increase their mutual probabilities, and the reduction, elimination, or workarounds of impediments, until the critical mass is assembled and the desired event or development happens.

**The Human Condition**: Humans are given two fundamental and powerful conditions: nature—what is born and develops according to its universal laws; and cultures—which we make and develop to order our lives. Nature changes relatively slowly—we can influence it, but only by following its laws—as Sir Francis Bacon wrote in the early 17th century: "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed." Culture changes much more rapidly, and we both influence and (rarely) control it.

Today humans are struggling, locally to globally, to moderate tumultuous and extremely dangerous transformations in nature—particularly in climate, biodiversity, and environmental stability. A similar scenario is playing out in cultures, including how we interact with nature. Cultures are also undergoing rapid transformations, which we are for the first time in history struggling hard to influence and ultimately control and stabilize.

In this fundamental context, our spiritual lives are at stake and suffering from fallacies in modernity, which we shall discuss below. Christianity, for its part, is deeply challenged—undermined and weakened as a part of modern culture, which is secular, owing to our own failures in leadership and practice. On the other hand however, as our culture struggles with nature for their mutual survival, our necessary and inevitable strategy must be de-secularization—to recover a return to wholeness of life and thought in a cosmological universe, which is Christianity's strength, upon which our religion has been historically predicated from its beginning.

**I. John’s *Gospel* as Systematic Argument**

**Summary:** This article presents a new textual analysis of John’s *Gospel*, showing that it was written not as biography as with the synoptic Gospels, but as a reasoned argument for the Christian religion, to persuade educated Hellenists that the obscure Jew Jesus of Nazareth was in fact Almighty God incarnate, made flesh to live and teach among humans, offering redemption and salvation to all who followed Him. The famous *Prologue* framed the argument by describing God in terms of the popularly familiar *Logos* of Classical and especially Stoic philosophy—i.e., as the omnipotent ordering power that created and governs the entire universe. The supporting reasoning consists in an orderly presentation of selected events from Jesus' ministry, adduced as evidence that He was considered by variously qualified witnesses, His own statements, and even by His Passion, to be divine.

**Brief Background Overview of *John*:** After Christ's death and resurrection, His followers felt no immediate need to record the events of His life because they believed that the end of the world with His second coming was imminent. After a while when that didn't happen, as many eye-witnesses had passed away, the numbers and diversity of His followers were increasing, and differences were arising among them concerning memories and meanings of His ministry, some felt it necessary to record what actually had been witnessed of Him. Paul had been recording parts of that in his epistles, but those were addressed to particular issues of particular churches rather than as a comprehensive argument or record. Mark was the first (A.D. 66-70) to record in writing an account of Jesus' life and teachings; Matthew and Luke followed soon afterward (A.D. 85-90), feeling that Mark's account needed expansion and improvement. All three of these "synoptic" Gospels were biographical, providing a narrative account of Jesus' life and ministry, written in Greek by Jews because the culture throughout the Mediterranean world was generally Hellenistic.

John, probably the "beloved disciple" and son of Zebedee, living in Ephesus (in what is now modern Turkey), probably together with another John known locally and loved as "the Elder", who was philosophical and a leading Christian there, felt a different calling (A.D. 90-110): to write a persuasive argument for the Christian religion, addressing the broader Classical world in its own more familiar terms. His (their) *Gospel*, accordingly, was not mainly biographical but hortatory—seeking especially to persuade and convert, thus to offer salvation, to a more philosophically and scientifically cultured Jewish and Gentile audience, proclaiming that Jesus of Nazareth—an obscure, humble and uncivilized (in Classical culture) Jew—was in fact the Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

"John's" *Gospel* was brilliantly executed and has earned the highest respect from leading theologians ever since. Augustine preferred it, and Luther called it the "chiefest" among the Gospels, "unique, tender, and true." It is considered today the favorite of the four Gospels among both professionals and the public.

One way to understand this is stylistic, and this gets us into theology. Here Christianity in its early history departed from all other religions. From time immemorial, the world’s religions used stories to explain the world and how it works, and accordingly how people should live. The *Old Testament* consists entirely in stories and laws based on historical narratives. Jesus was squarely in that tradition—he was a story-teller teaching by parables, not a systematic philosopher working with ideas and logic.

But with the “Great Commission” He launched a novel and transformative idea: “Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel. Make disciples of all nations.” “All the world” certainly includes our world today, but then it meant going out into the Mediterranean world of Classical Graeco-Roman civilization. Since Periclean Athens 500 years before Him, Greek culture, which had originated in myths, had become philosophical, describing the world not in terms of metaphors and stories, but in terms of ideas, logic, philosophy and science. In Jesus’ time the most widespread philosophy was Stoicism, whose central ethical precept was “Follow Nature.” Why? Because the world, Stoics taught, was created and ordered as a coherent whole universe by a single governing power, which they called the *Logos* (see Note, below), meaning the omnipotent ordering power driving the universe and everything in it. The object of Stoic science and philosophy, as well as of ethics in both theory and practice, was to “follow the *Logos*”—to order one’s life in harmony with the coherent and comprehensive system of natural laws governing everything. If you didn’t follow the *Logos*, you were in trouble—opposing the ordering power of the whole world.

So when the disciples were told to go out into all the world and preach the Gospel, they felt obliged to translate the Hebrew religion of stories into Graeco-Roman ideas and philosophy, and especially into terms consonant with Stoicism. Jesus’ Great Commandments —“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul, mind and strength, and thy neighbor as thyself”—were consistent with “following the *Logos*.”

St. John the Evangelist accordingly addressed his *Gospel* to the Classical as well as the Jewish world, opening with the philosophical and scientific assertion, “In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.” And then most dramatically and succinctly: “And the *Logos* became flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.” St. Paul, a Jew who promulgated the Christian religion with theological doctrines, had Stoic training, and in his *Epistle to the Romans* we read (Chapter 13:1) “All power is of God; there is no power but of God.” And in Chapter 12 we are taught to “present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God”, to commit ourselves entirely to the love of God.

**Linguistic Note: On *Logos*:** John’s *Gospel* is most known and loved for its opening *Prologue* of 18 verses commonly expressed in English as “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it…And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.”

The *Prologue* section may have been written mainly by the more sophisticated John "the Elder" in Ephesus, as its tone and reasoning are more cerebral than the rest of the *Gospel*. The Greek word used for what we know as “Word”, was *Logos*, a philosophical concept for which there was no Latin equivalent. Though that translation is not incorrect, the leading 20th century Classicist Werner Jaeger translated it as "rule”, “law”, “order”, or “reason"—closer to our word “logic” than to “word.” *Logos* as a metaphysical term had been coined by the philosopher Heraclitus (6th century B.C.) and most influentially by Zeno of Citium (ca. 300 B.C.), the founder of Stoicism. The renowned Jewish and Classical philosopher Philo (1st century A.D.) used it to refer to the creative and ordering power governing the entire universe—active and omnipotent reason, pervading and animating the world, which became identified with Natural Law, the fundamental concept undergirding philosophy and science. The Stoic Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius, a near-contemporary of John's, (121-180 A.D.), exemplified this tradition, defining *Logos* as the power that "governs the universe for all eternity.”

We have been taught that John’s *Gospel* *Prologue* translated *Logos* as "Word” because the formidable St. Jerome, in his authoritative Latin (“Vulgate”) translation of the *Bible* (ca. 383 A.D.)*,* having no Latin equivalent for the Greek concept of *Logos*, chose *verbum*, which became "word" in English. It was translated as such in the early 16th century by William Tyndale, the leader of the English Reformation and translator of the *Bible* into English, thence used in the influential “King James *Bible”* and subsequent editions. Though we don’t know whether it would have made any difference to Tyndale, his English translation occurred just as Classical Stoic philosophy was being recovered and becoming well-known in the Northern Renaissance. Consequently, Jerome's translation has led to a great deal of spinning by modern scholars attempting to show that the religious metaphor "Word" (e.g., as God "said" in *Genesis*) was actually a clarification of the Greek philosophical and scientific idea of the *Logos.*

In appropriating the concept of *Logos* John was reaching out especially to the Classical world as also Paul had done by other means, and as Christ had directed in the Great Commission: to go out into all nations and preach the Gospel (*Matt*. 28:16-20). Christianity, to gain broader adherence beyond Jewish culture, needed to address Roman and Greek civilization in their terms, and Stoicism was at that time the most

widely accepted popular philosophy. John was familiar with Stoicism. In trying to make the Judeo-Christian religious narrative intelligible and respectable in Classical culture, which was philosophical and scientific, articulated in terms of ideas more than metaphors or stories, John portrayed Jesus as in

fact the *Logos*incarnate, coming as God to dwell among humankind, as the Messiah for the whole world's salvation. John's rhetorical strategy substantially increased Christianity's eligibility to become a world religion, more than just a minor provincial Jewish sect. But at the same time—this will become more significant when we approach modern times— it tied Christian theology to cultures in ways that stories avoid.

The doctrine of Christ as *Logos*in Classical philosophical and scientific understanding acquired a highly influential subsequent history (cf. Chapter V of Jaroslav Pelikan's book, *Jesus through the Centuries, 1999).*It was understandably more common and prominent in Greek-speaking Eastern (Byzantine) Christianity but was well-known and used in the West as well. While some modern Christian theologians appreciate this Stoicism-related understanding of John’s *Prologue*, many and perhaps most do not.

**Textual Analysis:** Our question is, was John's *Gospel* strategically conceived and purposefully written as a bridge conveying the original Judeo-Christian religion to the larger world of gentile Classical culture, by connecting it with Stoicism, the most widespread popular philosophy of that time? Was John saying that both shared the same fundamental assumption: that the world is a coherent whole, governed by one omnipotent God, one universal law and order, known to Graeco-Roman civilization as the *Logos*? If this interpretation of John's *Gospel* is correct, it is the key distinction from the so-called "synoptic" Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, which are primarily biographical and closely parallel each other; and it calls upon us to study and learn from it differently than we do with the synoptics.

Scholars have conventionally understood John's *Gospel* as biography, divided into six parts [*Wikipedia*]:

 a) Chapter 1:1-18—Prologue

 b) Chapters 1:19-4:54—Christ as object of faith by His most significant and broader followers

 c) Chapters 5-12—about His conflicts with unbelievers

 d) Chapters 13-17—about His fellowship with believers

 e) Chapters 18-20—about His death and resurrection

 f) Epilogue chap 21—Epilogue, about various other subjects (e.g., authorship of the *Gospel*)

The main problems with this analysis are: 1) that each of the sections, read closely, is actually not as described here; and 2) that as described they have little to do with the *Prologue*, thus 3) fragmenting the text as a whole and begging many questions for academics to feed upon. Focusing on its biographical elements as with the synoptics, therefore seems merely to be conventional. If we read each of these sections closely and ask ourselves whether they focus on the subjects here alleged, the answer has to be no. Therefore, this interpretation is useless, distracting, and problematic as a textual analysis, raising more questions than it answers.

Another indication of current scholarly consensus is the summary in the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*. After the "magnificent" Prologue, we are told that John "sets forth Jesus Christ as the object of faith (1:19-4.54), depicts his conflict with unbelievers (chs. 5-12), his fellowship with believers (chs. 13-17), his death and resurrection (chs.18-20 and concludes with an epilogue (ch. 21)." Here again we see a biographical focus with no understanding of a coherent, purposeful and compelling rhetorical structure, but rather a perfunctory summation of biographical details lacking direction or intensity.

Full disclosure: To repeat, I am not a Bible scholar—my training was in Renaissance and Reformation history. My own scan of recent scholarly research, and a discussion with 80 Academia.com Johannine scholars, has revealed no special interest in rhetorical purpose and structure, as if this were a non-issue even when addressing the connection of *Logos* with Stoicism. Scholars today seem more concerned with conventional issues among themselves—e.g., biography, relation to the synoptics, authorship, theology, and language.

But in an Adult Education program in 2020 at St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church in Dover, Massachusetts, we read this *Gospel* with fresh eyes and open minds, seeking by close textual analysis to understand its structure as a coherent whole leading out from the *Prologue*. We readily discovered a closely reasoned,

extended argument focusing throughout on a single subject: the identity of Jesus as God incarnate*.* It progresses in an orderly way from John's own understanding in the *Prologue*, to those of others who knew Him best—e.g., John the Baptist, first disciples, Jesus' family, Nicodemus—then in ever-broadening

circles of his followers, to individuals and groups who had progressively less intensive encounters with Him, then to Jesus' own assertions about who He was in response to His critics and followers. All these biographical reports were adduced not for biography but as evidence, confirming that He was in fact the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world. Finally, John confronted the most challenging issue: that if He were indeed all of those, how was it that He allowed Himself to be captured, tortured, and executed? John strikingly makes of this his conclusive argument: that His loving self-sacrifice for all humankind had been foretold of the Messiah(!) by the prophets—e.g., Isaiah and the suffering servant, *et al*. This is one of the greatest—most profound, complex and challenging—ideas in the history of religions.

John did not, however, lay all of this out with an explicit line of reasoning, or as an abstract theological argument—that was not his training or habit. What he did was simply to invoke these selected incidents from Christ's life, speaking for themselves as evidence, confirming the *Prologue*'s thesis. This spare, empirical mode of argumentation may help to explain why scholars have tended to associate this *Gospel* with its synoptic biographical predecessors. The fact remains, however, that a close textual analysis, presuming and revealing rhetorical coherence and following the direction of the *Prologue* in search of supporting material, readily finds it.

To clinch the matter John himself, in concluding his *Gospel* (Chapter 20:30-31), explicitly declared his intention as argumentative, differentiating it from the synoptics: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” This is explicit proof, from the author himself, in the text itself, of the validity and truth of the coherent-argument analysis of its purpose and structure. Perhaps modern readers might have more readily understood the whole as such if this had been placed at the beginning rather than in a concluding *Epilogue* of the text.

There is a stylistic feature further buttressing this analysis. In John's time formal rhetoric followed conventional rules. These had been laid down originally by Aristotle in his paradigm-setting manual *De Rhetoricis* (367-322 B.C.). He defined "rhetoric" as “the power to see, in each case, the possible ways to persuade.” His manual said that for an oral or written composition to be persuasive it must be constructed as an argument, containing three basic elements: *ethos* (the authority and credibility of the speaker)*, logos* (the linguistic and logical structure of the argument itself)*,* and *pathos* (addressing audiences' feelings)*.*

John's most targeted readership of cultivated Hellenistic Gentiles presumably did not know much if anything about the details of the end of Christ's life on Earth, and in the several chapters leading to Gethsemane John noticeably refrained from suggesting what was about to happen. He did say that Jesus was going to be "betrayed" by one of the twelve, but beyond that there was no hint of the dramatic details of His Passion—His capture, torture, trial, crucifixion, or death, much less resurrection. All John said in these previous chapters was that Christ was about to "depart", to go away, that his mission among humans was accomplished, that the disciples would be comforted in their sorrow at losing Him by a Spirit sent from God for that purpose, and that all those who loved Him would be granted God's love and salvation.

In short, all that John was asserting in these chapters was that Christ's earthly mission was complete and about to be over, and that it was a success story. These chapters also presented the densest theological exposition—the most since the *Prologue*—noting the critics and followers to whom Christ responded, putting a positive spin on the narrative, setting up for his readers a constructive summation, but avoiding any reference to what was actually to come. This meant that His capture in Gethsemane and subsequent dramatic and painful events appear suddenly and unexpectedly. As textual analysts, we must ask, why? In Gethsemane the whole story takes a sudden dramatic and negative turn. This may have been intended to evoke *pathos*, so thatin this waythe whole text from the *Prologue* to the crucifixion comes together, conforming exactly to Aristotle's rhetorical paradigm as a single coherent argument following conventional rules of persuasion.

**Conclusion**: A primary criterion of truth in textual analysis is the illumination of coherence in a text. Seeing the entire body of this *Gospel* as a continuation of its *Prologue*, designed to support its main idea, has a superior claim to truth over the modern conventional analyses cited above, which have required semantic dancing around the central concept of the *Logos* and have led to various evasions of a main line of argumentation, in effect marginalizing the issue of textual coherence and diminishing the critical importance and strategic purpose of its composition.

A new interpretation of an already singularly important text obviously has important historical and heuristic ramifications, which may serve as further tests of the new understanding's validity, truth and significance. Historical and heuristic research should help settle this issue.

Historically, the main issue now raised is whether, how, and to what degree, John's strategic intention in composing this argument succeeded or failed. Was it effective or not in opening the broader culture of the Classical Mediterranean world to penetration by the original and thoroughly traditional Hebrew-oriented Christianity? How did contemporary, early and successive readers receive this new *Gospel*? Did they understand it as interpreted here, and if so, how did they respond? If not, how and why not?

Heuristically, these questions open fresh lines of scholarly research and interpretation. Associated texts should be reviewed in its new and different light, perhaps illuminating various historical issues. One interesting and significant possibility might be to accept John's *Gospel* as the first systematic argument for Christianity, laying down its first, most basic, principal: that "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.” It is now possible to study the subsequent history of our religion as unfolding from this base. That is what these subsequent brief chapters have been conceived to accomplish.

**II. St. Augustine, the *City of God,* and Christendom**

A history of Christianity from John's *Gospel* in the first century to St. Dunstan in the tenth, and then to Luther and the Reformations in the sixteenth, needs also to take account of the thousand-year history of what was then known as "Christendom"—now "Europe." This was an entire major cultural-historical period in which the dominant institutions and leading individuals, as well as the population at large, professed to be and to be acting as Christians, seeking or manifesting their individual and collective salvation. Those centuries—a millennium—have been known since the mid-19th century as the "Middle Ages", or "medieval" period—between Ancient or Classical history of Greece and Rome (in which St. John lived), and Modern (Western) history, beginning with the Renaissance and Reformation in the 15th-16th centuries, which aspired to revive their ancient Classical roots in culture and religion.

It may be time now to move beyond that tripartite periodization of Western history, as our own time is now moving beyond "modernity" and into a new fourth period (see Chapter 8, below). In that case, this Christian millennium would be more accurately designated as the Age of Christendom, referring to the hegemony of the Roman Catholic Church and Papacy. We may still call it "medieval" or between two ages, but not the "Middle" Ages, suggesting only three.

Whatever its historiographical rubric, any connection of Catholicism's thread from the *Gospel* through Dunstan to Luther must prominently feature St. Augustine about halfway there (354-430). He was Bishop of Hippo in North Africa (modern Algeria); his masterpiece was the *Civitas Dei,* or *City of God* (412-427); and he inspired the millennium of Christendom. Both Dunstan and Luther were Augustinians, but their connections with him were far deeper than institutional ties.

The main thing to know about Augustine is that his life and work not only coincided chronologically with the transition from the "Ancient" or "Classical" period to the next period of Catholicism, but that they actually marked and helped shape that transition, from the dominance of Roman Classical culture to that of Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church.

An often-cited symbolic historical boundary between the two periods was when on August 24th, 410 A.D., Rome—the so-called "Eternal City" and ancient capital of Western Classical civilization—after long decline was overrun and sacked by the "barbarian" Visigoth Alaric. Scholarly histories of the transition are generally thought to have begun in the 18th-century with Edward Gibbon's magisterial six-volume history, the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, which he famously said he had been stimulated to write when, one late afternoon on the Capitoline Hill in Rome, he condescendingly observed from his Enlightenment perspective, "barefooted friars chanting their litanies in the Temple of Jupiter."

The historic transition was also expressed in Augustine's own life. Though his mother Monica was Christian, he was originally a pagan dualist Manichean and neo-Platonist philosopher, trained for a career as a Classical rhetorician and professor, culminating in Milan during the influential episcopacy of St. Ambrose (374-397). Ambrose persuaded Augustine that evil is the absence of good, consequently the absence of being. This persuaded Augustine that Christianity had the greater truth, so Augustine converted to Christianity and was baptized by Ambrose at age 34 in 387. He returned to North Africa and was ordained into the clergy in 391, then recruited to be bishop of the diocese of Hippo in 395-6, gaining fame as what we today would call a "public intellectual", brilliantly and influentially addressing important public issues in his sermons and writings promoting Christianity.

In the several centuries from John's *Gospel* to Alaric and Augustine, Christianity had dramatically spread and apparently triumphed. Church Fathers had clarified and unified its doctrines, and competed successfully against other beliefs, despite Roman persecution. Then in 312 the emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity by his miraculous victory in the Battle of Milvian Bridge, predicted by his dream of the Cross with the message, "*in hoc signo vinces"* ("in this sign you will conquer"). He ended the Roman persecution of Christians, and in 380 his successor emperor Theodosius I declared Christianity to be the official religion of the Roman Empire, or what remained of it.

The sack of Rome in 410 raised the most momentous public issue of that time. Was it a sign of God's judgement against pagan Classicism, or against Christianity's subversion of Classicism? Augustine resolved to defend Christianity by analyzing the fallacies of Classical polytheism, and from a Christian point of view the nature and meaning of history itself. Scholars have often noted that the *Civitas Dei* was the Christian counterpart to Classical predecessors—Plato's *Republic* and Cicero's *De Republicis*—but the comparison is superficial and misleading; Plato and Cicero were defining good government, not the nature and meaning of history, nor the human condition, nor matters of theology, sin and salvation.

How could a religion promoting humility, love and forgiveness rise to create and dominate an entire and widespread culture as "Christendom"? The answer is the totality of purview and commitment inherent in authentic religion as "ultimate concern", qualifying and subordinating all other concerns. This can apply to societies as well as individuals. It asserts the capability to order entire personal lives.

As this is history we're discussing, there are also issues of timing and causation, which were crucial for empowering Augustine's influence. His books appeared not when Classicism was at its most robust and entrenched cultural dominance, but pretty much the opposite: its vulnerability—in what have been known as the "Dark Ages"—several centuries when what had been the powerful Roman Empire was in increasing decline, subverted by internal corruption and overrun by foreign barbarian invasions. Political, economic, social and cultural infrastructures were weak and in chaos. Population and agriculture had sharply declined, poverty and disorder were ubiquitous.

In that context, Augustine's appropriation of the concept of "city" as a vigorous spiritual and moral entity, in a time of impoverished "real world" examples, acquired special emphasis. What he promoted successfully was an energetic and robust rising Christian alternative to what had been declining Classical culture throughout the Empire and Mediterranean world. Real-world impoverishment strengthened his case for Christianity as intellectually and practically superior to pagan polytheism in ordering the whole lives of its believers. Human shortcomings—occasional or persistent disobedience to God and His Commandments—was explained by the doctrine of sin—proneness to evil and slothfulness in good—and the remedy of God's saving grace, with repentance and forgiveness. Lacking effective public safety administration—laws and law enforcement—the Christian apparatus had emerged by default as the primary ordering and peacekeeping influence, on which most people were forced to depend.

Augustine began his Preface to the *City of God* saying, "The glorious City of God is my theme in this work." He declared his purpose was "to persuade the proud how great is the virtue of humility." His central thesis was that all humans, in everything we think and do, participate figuratively as citizens of two diametrically opposed and competing communities. The dynamic is consistent with the concept of following the *Logos.*:

"Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from humans; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God, 'Thou art my glory, and the lifter up of my head.' [Psalm 3:3] In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying while the former are considerate of all."

The complete work consists of 22 books, written over 15 years (ca. 412-426) and divided into two parts: Books I-X address the fallacies of paganism, demonstrating Christianity's intellectual, philosophical, and historical superiority, and arguing that Classical polytheism, not monotheistic Christianity, subverted itself, causing the fall of Rome by its own inherent fallacies, corruption and decay. Books XI-XXII then go on to defend Christianity as a divinely inspired and empowered true religion, showing in detail what it was and how it worked in terms of the two "Cities."

To say that his argument was persuasive would be a vast understatement; its various parts collectively became the most-read book in Christendom—though it must be acknowledged that in this age of hand-

written and highly costly publications there was not much competition; on the other hand, publication was decentralized and in the hands of monks in scriptoria, so this amounts to highly successful peer-review of his work. Augustine's contemporary, St. Jerome (342-420), translator of the *Bible* into Latin (383-404), wrote that Augustine had "established anew the ancient Faith" [i.e., that of Christ and John's *Gospel*]*.* In 800 A.D. the French king Charlemagne, created the "Holy Roman Empire" explicitly (and mistakenly) accrediting Augustine for the idea of establishing the Heavenly City on Earth, as a counter against the aggressions of the Roman Church in worldly affairs. For a thousand years—the "Age of Christendom"—Augustine's authority in defining Christian doctrine was considered second only to that of Sts. Paul and John. Some modern historians believe that St. Augustine had virtually defined what became the dominant culture of medieval history, within which of course St. Dunstan became a leader.

That interpretation is not as far-fetched as it might seem, for what Augustine gave to Christendom was a new Judeo-Christian world view and understanding of history itself—as having direction and therefore meaning.

The word "histories" as coined in the 5th century B.C.E. by Herodotus, "the Father of History", meant simply "inquiries", in which past and present events and developments were studied for their edifying lessons. Classical philosophies of history understood it as operating according to repetitive patterns or cycles like seasons of the year, or examples for moral and scientific instruction. Augustine focused instead on twos4 unique and cosmologically powerful events: the Creation, by the one omnipotent God, and Christ's saving incarnation, mission, crucifixion and resurrection. He saw those two unique events as points connecting a line—history's trajectory, giving it meaning. He posited six previous ages of "man" corresponding to the Biblical six days of Creation: the first day from Adam to Noah; the second from Noah to Abraham; the third from Abraham to David; the fourth from David to the Babylonian captivity; the fifth from there to the preaching of John (n.b.), and the sixth from John onward. These ages were further informed by the two persistent communities, or "Cities." At the world's end, with the Reincarnation and Last Judgement, the two Cities would be finally separated, and mankind would reach our rest (on the seventh day, or Sabbath).

Augustine's analysis of history shaped medieval culture. The role of the Church in governing society was enormously enhanced. Humans' fundamental longing was for a peacefully ordered society of fellowship and love, existential commitments which secular governments could not provide but for which the Church was created—not to be identical with society, but to provide leadership and service. Emerging from the ashes of Classical imperialism, medieval civilization was led by the rising monastic movement, informed by the Augustinian doctrine of the two Cities—loving God and loving mundane things apart from God. How they related to each other conceptually and practically, throughout the medieval history of Church and (eventually) Empire, distinguished the Age of Christendom from all other periods of Western history. For the next thousand years Western society had a Christian purpose: to save human souls. It was a heroic ambition and intention, a supreme test for Christianity as a religion—and it undeniably failed, as was entirely predictable in Augustinian terms.

The failures are attributable to the understandable tendencies to conflate the Church with the City of God and the State with the Earthly City, or to conflate Church and State together as the City of God under supposedly priestly rulers, as in the Holy Roman Empire (800 CE). Augustine was aware of these corrupting tendencies —he wrote that "The emperor has become a Christian, but the Devil has not." He was careful to stipulate that the two Cities are distinct but inextricably mixed in both individuals and institutions, including both Church and Empire. In particular, as Lord Acton later (1887) observed, power tended to corrupt, and absolute power corrupted absolutely. In the medieval Church and Empire, leaders of both sought absolute power in countless corrupting ways.

Their pursuit of power was understandable in light of Scripture itself. St. Matthew's *Gospel* (16:15-19) recorded Christ's saying to Simon, "And I tell you, you are Peter (*petros,* or "rock"), and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you bind on Earth shall be bound in Heaven, and what you loosen on Earth will be loosened in Heaven." Moreover St. Paul, in his Letter to the *Romans* (13:1) wrote that "All

power is of God; there is no power but of God", and therefore everyone should obey governing authorities.

The Church's ascendancy came first. In the later 5th century, Pope Leo I "the Great" (440-461) cited Matthew and Paul in asserting what later became known as the papal doctrine of the "plenitude of power" (*plenitudo potestatis*) within the Church, which he successfully used to claim the primacy of the Bishop of Rome over all other bishops. His successor Gelasius I (492-496) consolidated that claim by declaring independence of the papacy (and the Church) from the emperor, a secular ruler, citing Jesus' separation (*Matthew* 22:22) of what is God's and what is Caesar's proper spheres (as St. Ambrose had previously asserted).

The ecclesiastical side of the Age was most powerfully promoted by monasticism, which emerged as a major movement from the 6th to 11th centuries. It was an attempt to harness the Christian religion to the greater power of institutions to order human life, through the establishment of rules governing the whole of life—every minute of every hour of every day, in communities set apart from the rest of society as more or less islands of peace and order in the temporal world. Though not mentioned in the *Bible*, the inclination to create small monastic communities appeared in early Christianity. Generally, monasteries avoided the depredations afflicting the rest of society. The Barbarians left them alone, and their well-ordered austerity and simplicity of life helped. Monastic agriculture and horticulture produced the most reliable sources of food and medicines. They monopolized literacy with their *scriptoria*, libraries and schools. Publication was solely by their manuscripts, in their costly books. Over time, they matured and ripened as all other institutions decayed or were destroyed, so that eventually they were the strongest candidate for historic leadership. Then in 520 Benedict of Nursia founded at Monte Cassino what became the "Benedictine" Order. Their operating manual of rules became widely imitated.

The next major step came from Pope Gregory I "the Great" (590-604) a Benedictine monk and Augustinian theologian. He saw the strategic potential of the Order, and so energetically promoted its growth and spread, in the course of which he asserted that political institutions can only address outward behavior, whereas the Church is concerned with religion, which has existential dimensions beyond the competence of secular government. He also cultivated relationships with French rulers. He seems to have had a grand strategic vision of a Western Christendom as an independent religious civilization, under the leadership of the papacy and apart from the Eastern Church in Constantinople—what became medieval Catholicism. His successor Pope Gregory II (715-731) promoted the idea of the Roman papacy's hegemony over both Church and secular rulers.

The plot thickened in the later 8th century when Pepin, Mayor of the French royal court but actual ruler, ostensibly serving the monarch, secured papal support as properly entitled ruler. His son, Charlemagne, in the presence of the pope on Christmas Day in 800, crowned himself Holy Roman Emperor, to rule over both Empire and Church, which he wrongly claimed fulfilled Augustine's vision of the Heavenly City.

Yoking the Church and Empire, however, contained a fundamental though then imperceptible flaw. Empire was based on the rising power of armed knights—what developed into feudalism (not then known as such)—which was intrinsically secular, grounded in the principle that might makes right. Technology played a role—the stirrup was becoming widespread in Europe since the early 8th century, significantly increasing the power of knights on horseback. There followed a medieval arms race of increasing the size, weight, and cost of armored knights, which was made affordable by increasing grants of income-producing land, secured by increasing ties of fealty by vassals to their overlords. That was the feudal system, hardening in France in the 9th century, in England in the 11th, and Germany in the 12th centuries. It was secular in its totally empirical nature—`based on no higher principles or values, nor even concepts of public power. It was entirely private, based on ownership of land. There were no concepts of law, nor justice, nor public accountability, only private property. If ownership of land was contested, settlement was by collective judgement of neighboring peers—who they thought owned the land. Their decision was binding because they had the greater power. As private property, land—the only source of wealth and power—was heritable, hence family dynasties, marriage and legitimacy of offspring, were closely watched and carefully managed.

Of course there could not be close mixing without interacting influences. The secular power's influence was subversive; the religious influence at least purportedly constructive, to infuse Christian values into the military system of land ownership. Two examples were chivalry and the Crusades, in the 11th to 13th centuries. Chivalry attempted to add codes of honor to knighthood, the Crusades to direct knightly activity to Christian ends, mainly outside Christendom, with the recovery of the Holy Land from the infidel Muslims. Both were initiated by the religious side, and both evoked literary traditions, such as the Arthurian cycle in what became England and the so-called "courtly love" movement in what became France, which arose when women were left in charge of castles and values while the men were away on the Crusades. Both were partially successful in promoting Christian values.

The fundamental dynamic of the Age of Christendom therefore, was like an Aristotelian tragedy: the protagonist was Catholicism; the antagonist was secularity; the tragic flaw which proved determinative was the sinfulness of humanity. Augustine's vision in the *City of God* was confirmed.

**III. St. Dunstan—His Religion and Ours**

On the 50th anniversary of St. Dunstan’s Episcopal Parish, Dover, MA

2016

**Sources:** We are considering here the life of an individual cleric in the 10th century—more than a thousand years ago. We understand, therefore, that the sources of information which have survived are extremely few and not focused on issues of our interest. We have next to nothing that Dunstan himself wrote, and surviving archival records of his official career are extremely sparse.

They include, however, a modern scholarly edition of two primary sources published for his millennium: the two earliest “lives,” one by a contemporary monk who actually knew him briefly, the second also by a monk from the early 11th century, both written as hagiographies—presenting the case for his beatification as a Saint.

Modern Dunstan scholarship began in the mid-19th century with a *Memorial* by the eminent British historian (Bishop) William Stubbs. A children’s book in 1871 retold a legend of one of Dunstan’s miraculous encounters with the Devil, which was recently republished and is already in our parish library. In 1923 another leading Church historian, J. A. Robinson, published *The Times of St. Dunstan*, now out of print and unavailable in this country [Later note: I found one, not in great shape but affordable, and it is now in our parish collection]. It includes chapters on Dunstan and several contemporaries; the Dunstan chapter is an especially vivid personal portrait. At his millennium in 1988, the Archbishop of Canterbury commissioned a full biography by a Church historian, a commemorative Conference, with the Proceedings published in 1992 but available now only on the internet, and an art exhibit of portraits. The biography is conventionally academic, densely learned but a bit dry for ordinary readers. The Conference presented 16 scholarly papers on various topics, large and small. The portraits from various periods are all imagined, with the sole exception of this:



Here we have a unique treasure: a primary source created by Dunstan himself, including his own self-portrait—a 10th-century “selfie”, if you will. It presents a conventional “*Image of Christ as Divine Wisdom*”, in a style later known as Anglo-Saxon line drawing, with the Christ very large in Byzantine iconographic style for His importance, and the diminutive figure of Dunstan, the tonsured monk (also a scholar and teacher), recumbent at Christ’s feet. Its message is six lines with the words (from Psalm 33:12): 'Come ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord'.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Evidence of his authorship is in two places: above, a two-line inscription added later in an archaic Gothic script, saying: 'The image and writing seen below on this page is [sic] by St Dunstan’s own hand.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Some scholars have suggested that the “est” is a grammatical error for two subjects; but what it means is that the image and the writing are a single composition, both done by Dunstan.

Second, the four lines of script above Dunstan, read: “I ask you to watch over me, Dunstan;// May you not permit the Taenarian storms to swallow me.”[[3]](#footnote-3) This is a quote from a 9th-century Benedictine monk Hrabanus Maurus, referring to the entrance to Hell. Dunstan replaced the name “Hrabanum” with his own.

**The Man:** This will not be a full narrative of Dunstan’s life and accomplishments, which can be found in standard sources—e.g., Wikipedia, the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, the *Dictionary of National Biography* (*DNB*)—but as a suggestion of his significance for us today, in this parish.

First, some basic facts: Dunstan was born ca. 908-10, and died 80 years later, May 19th, 988—so his life was exceptionally long and spanned nearly the entire 10th century. His name meant “stone” or “rugged”, and he was known as “Dunstan the Resolute.” His Feast Day is May 19, the date of his death in 988. He was certainly one of the most, if not the most, influential figure(s) in 10th century ecclesiastical, cultural, and secular affairs in what is now England. We share Dunstan as a parish name with 20 others. Out of 7500 Episcopal parishes with 533 names, Dunstan ranks 58th, which is in the bottom 7%. So our parish name is exceptional, and suggests that we might especially benefit from finding out what we have to learn from him.

“Lives” of medieval saints are not very useful as history, because they follow a standard template—to show that this life was just like those of already beatified saints. The rules were laid down by popes, who gradually arrogated to themselves the power of beatification. The nominees are routinely described as guided by the Holy Spirit; their births are prefigured in miraculous events; their parents are remarkably pious; as children they are precocious and loved by all; they are appointed to holy offices but at first decline out of humility; they do many good works—restoring churches, monasteries and cities, caring for the poor, performing miracles; they raise morals, make peace, travel to Rome; and on their deathbeds make inspiring exhortations. Generally they are portrayed as setting examples of the Christian life for ordinary Christians to follow—in other words, beatification had a significant teaching function, which is one reason why we should pay attention to, or “hearken unto”, it in Dunstan’s case.

From an historical perspective, Dunstan’s life divides into four periods, each about 20 years long—at a time when average life-expectancy was about 31 years, or 64 for those who reached 31.

He was born into a noble family around the royal Anglo-Saxon court at Glastonbury, in Wessex, in the south of what is now England but then was divided by warring tribes of various ethnicities. The court at Glastonbury had been firmly established in the 9th century by King Alfred the Great—a successful warrior, scholar, Christian, patron of arts, and generally all-round respectable ruler. “England” had seen better days—in the 8th century it had produced, for the French King and Christendom's Emperor

Charlemagne, two leaders: his right-hand man, Alcuin—who led the so-called “Carolingian renaissance” and created the Carolingian miniscule manuscript style, that today we call “Italic”; and St. Boniface, whom the pope sent as a missionary to convert Germanic peoples to Christianity. So Alfred was leading a revival, but the times were terribly violent, mostly uncivilized, just emerging from centuries-long poverty known as the “Dark Ages” between the fall of the Roman Empire (departing Britain in the 6th century), the Barbarian invasions, and the rise of "high" medieval civilization in the 12th to 14th centuries. This was before national kingdoms, and before the Norman Conquest in 1066, which unified England. What we now call “Europe” was then Christendom, led by the papacy over mostly subordinate secular rulers. They needed each other to keep order; the Church itself was led by monks; secular clergy were extremely diverse in qualifications. There was very little education, and that only for the clergy. Violence was everywhere, so the dominant emotion of the period was probably fear.

Dunstan’s youth was devoted to being educated by Celtic monks, and training in all sorts of crafts—gold- and silver-smithing, musical composition and performance, organ-building, and his smithy—at all of which he excelled, in preparation for adult life as a monk. His parents permitted him to be tonsured when he was 13, and he was sent to the court of an uncle who was Archbishop of Canterbury. After some time his uncle returned him to the Abbey of Glastonbury, where he again distinguished himself by building a small hovel attached to St. Mary’s Church, living like a hermit, perfecting his metallurgical skills, composing and playing music, praying, and illuminating manuscripts in the Abbey’s *scriptorium* where he learned to draw, as with his self-portrait.

In 940, at the age of 32, he was promoted by the king, after complicated and supposed miraculous happenings, to be Abbot (or head monk) of Glastonbury, in which capacity he served until 960. In that prestigious and powerful position, he completely restored and revived the Abbey to pre-eminence in the British Church, raising its school and *scriptorium* to industrial-scale productivity in scholars, future church leaders, and both legal and ecclesiastical manuscript publishing. His personal life was conspicuously pious, he composed many pieces of liturgical music, and became a leading advisor to the monarch on all matters, secular and ecclesiastical.

After a *contretemps* with enemies at court under a new king in 958, he went into a two-year exile in Ghent, in what is now Belgium, where he witnessed first-hand the Benedictine reform movement then sweeping the Continent, strengthening discipline throughout the Church and its clerical leadership. With another change in the monarchy back home he returned in 960 and was soon named Bishop of Winchester, Worcester, and finally Archbishop of Canterbury, to lead the entire Church in Britain. He made the customary pilgrimage to Rome to receive his pallium or episcopal vestment from the pope, along the way contributing to the poor and teaching.

His 28 years of service as Archbishop, 960-988, is one of the longest tenures in the history of the British Church. It was divided into two periods: In the first 18 years he continued his outstanding administrative and religious leadership which he had already demonstrated as Abbot, now on a much broader scale. He was the leading influence behind the *Concordia of the Rule*—a unique operating manual for the British clergy, based on the Benedictine Rule and reform movement on the Continent. He placed his former Glastonbury students in positions of authority throughout Britain, thus disseminating the reforms he had introduced at Glastonbury. He served as a “prime minister” to the crown in secular affairs, until in 978 he lost influence at court, and in his last ten years resumed his ascetic personal, deeply pious, exemplary, contemplative religious life of prayer and humble crafts. He was, even while living, widely regarded as a saint; in the first 25 years after he died in 988, six parish churches in and around London were dedicated to “St. Dunstan”, and preparations were quickly made to nominate him for beatification.

**Significance: His Religion and Ours**: We share Christianity, though he was a Roman Catholic 500 years before the Reformation, and we are Protestant Episcopalians 500 years afterward. What is most significant in that? Basically, 1) he was much more deeply pious than we are, as an Augustinian monk and model citizen of the City of God, seeing everything in his world in reference to God. As a certified Saint he was exemplary for us. But a principal difference from us is that he was living in the medieval

culture of Christendom, whereas we are living in a modern secular culture. How each of us respectively is Christian, turns on that fundamental, contextual difference.

Following his example, the purpose of this parish of St. Dunstan’s is to help us parishioners to order our lives around the ultimate concern of loving God with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths, and our neighbors as ourselves—to teach us the value of harmonizing our lives, individually, together in our families, and in our various communities, despite and in opposition to our common enemy: secularity—the antagonistic and demoralizing pressures of this fragmented, broken and sinful, human world. We are fortunate to have Dunstan’s example before us.

**Bibliography:**

I have gathered the main published materials to create our own parish collection of modern “Dunstaniana” accessible in the parish library and listed below:

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Edward G. Flight, George Cruikshank, eds.: *The True Legend of Saint Dunstan And the Devil*, (1871; modern Kessinger reprint edition, 2010)

In a separate category is:

The Rev. John Henry Blunt: *The St. Dunstan Plainsong Psalter*, (Launcelot Andrews Press, 2002).

This contains nothing by St. Dunstan but was named in his honor. It offers the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer* (Coverdale) texts of the 150 Psalms, plus Old Testament and Gospel Canticles, set to plainsong chants in the ancient Gregorian style and notation.

**IV. Honoring Martin Luther, on the 500th Anniversary of the Protestant Reformation**

St. Dunstan’s Episcopal Church, Dover, MA, November 2017

**Processional Hymn:** *Ein Feste Burg* (“A Mighty Fortress is our God”, Unison, Martin Luther, 1527)

**Old Testament: Jeremiah 31: 31-34** “I will put the law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.”

**Psalm: 46** “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble....”

**New Testament:** Acts 5: 33-39 “If this...is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them....”—Gamaliel.

**Recessional Hymn:** *Ein Feste Burg* (words Martin Luther, harmonization Johann Sebastian Bach)

The history of Judeo-Christian religion has had persistent difficulties with institutionalization. Whereas both religion and institutions are intended to order our lives, so that we naturally tend to combine them, in religion this has produced recurring problems. We see this in the *Old Testament* in the dialectic between the laws and the prophets; in the time of Christ, Paul and John, between the Pharisees and the Gospel; in the early Church, between lay Christians and monasticism; in St. Augustine’s *City of God* between the earthly and the heavenly “cities”; in medieval Christendom between the worldly powers of the popes and kings, and recurrent spiritual reformers; and most decisively in the Protestant Reformations of the 16th century.

Consequently, all religious “Reformations” (the designation was coined in the 12th century by Joachim of Flora), have consisted in simplifying institutional structures—pruning away the extravagant elaborations that normally occur in institutional histories. Luther’s “Reformation” followed that pattern, and so was not new in that respect; what was new was its profound depth and its technological power, which accounts for its permanence—that it stuck. How that happened is revealing—this long dialectical tradition tells us something that is true about Christianity, which is its essential spirituality.

Medieval Christianity, for better and worse, was instituted by monks, who sought to perfect their Christian lives by following rules. They were the only people who could read and write, in their common language of Latin, from handwritten, costly and rare manuscripts. Gradually over the centuries, the institutional Church, which was led by monks, arrogated to itself total control over religion, under the leadership of popes and administered by trained clergy. Religious life became thoroughly encrusted by regulations, designed to govern every detail of daily life. When from time to time reformers opposed stifling and often corrupt accretions, they were criminalized as heretics, who if they did not recant, were excommunicated and usually burned. The most prominent late medieval example was Jan Hus in Bohemia a century before Luther, many of whose ideas Luther came to share.

Martin Luther was not just a “great man”, he was one of the greatest of men—what the 19th century German philosopher Hegel called a “world-historical individual”—someone whose life changed world history. Luther’s main accomplishment, though he did not originally intend it, was to shatter forever the purported unity of medieval Western Christendom under the leadership of the Roman papacy. How did he accomplish that?

To begin with, what kind of person was he? He had a huge and strong personality—enormously charismatic, passionate, intellectually brilliant and critical, totally determined, devoted to the whole range of human experience from spiritual to practical, and in rhetoric from eschatological to scatological. He was extremely learned in Biblical studies and Church history, but was also widely known, respected and loved as a man of the people, whose greatest pleasures he said were family, food, music, and beer. He was an accomplished lutenist and loved to sing. Once he began the Reformation, he became an extremely prolific and compelling writer and preacher—eloquent, insightful and often funny. What historians have missed, until recent research has produced the data to discover it, was that he was also a highly skilled leader and strategist, the first one to weaponize the technological revolution of printing to create a mass protest movement, overwhelming his hopelessly outmatched Catholic opponents.

Notably he was not an institution-builder of an alternative Church (he left that to others) he transformed spiritual life and worship, appealing broadly beneath the Latinate clergy to reach the hearts and minds of the laity through his vernacular writings, preaching, and hymns, in German.

In 1517 he was already 34 years old—a locally prominent but otherwise unpublished and obscure Augustinian monk, preacher, and professor in Bible studies at the new (1502) and small University in the rural town of Wittenberg, in Saxony, northeastern Germany. His father, who owned a copper mining business, had sent his eldest son to the university at Erfurt to study law so that he could eventually help run the business. But Martin did not take to the law, and in a frightening experience with lightning in a thunderstorm, he pledged to St. Anne (the mother of Mary), that if he survived he would become a monk. He did survive, and kept his promise, in 1512 joining the Augustinian order in Wittenberg. There as a novitiate he was given his own Bible, which he was seeing for the first time at age 28.

This was hugely significant. Bibles were generally neither known nor used in medieval times. In manuscript they were extremely costly to produce, so only a few institutions had them. Bible stories were depicted graphically in church windows and sculpture, but scriptural texts were known only in snippets, in Latin, as parts of liturgy, which only clerics and scholars could read or understand. Extremely few laypeople, therefore, knew even what books were in the Bible; chapters and verses only became numbered during the Reformation, to facilitate the citation of texts in debates.

So when Martin Luther was given his own Bible, he devoured it—read it cover to cover, over and over. There he discovered how very different the Christianity of his own time was from what it had been originally. Being a mature adult of acutely sharp critical intelligence, he wondered what justified the differences. This led him to study Church history from a critical perspective, and that led him to conclude that the most reliable criterion of truth and authenticity in Christian doctrine, institutions and practices, had to be Scripture alone—“*sola scriptura*.” Common practice, decisions of Church Councils, even declarations by the popes themselves, were chaotic and needed validation from Scripture, in which Luther was now supremely learned.

As a monk, Luther led a prodigiously disciplined and correct life. He said, “The ultimate and fundamental need of man is to be right with God.” But he did not feel “right with God”, no matter how hard he tried. Being thoroughly conscientious and perfectionist, he was tormented by a painful sense of his own sinfulness and personal unworthiness. He obeyed all the rules, confessed many times over every sin he could remember from his past life, but found no sense of redemption from God’s displeasure. Luckily he had a patient, sympathetic, and wise mentor in Johann von Staupitz, the head of the Augustinian order in Saxony, and professor of theology in the University. Staupitz persuaded Martin to help himself by pursuing graduate studies in theology, and then to earn a doctorate, to become a scholar and professor in Bible studies. Staupitz also sent him to Rome on a diplomatic mission for the Order, and in the reputed Holy City of Rome, filled with many of the holiest relics in Christian history, Luther made all the pilgrim observances seeking salvation, but again, with no relief from his "*Anfechtungen"*—assaults against his soul. “Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God...I could not believe He was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love...yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners. I hated the words “righteousness of God.”

“I beat importunately upon Paul (*Romans* 1:17), most ardently desiring to know what He wanted. “For in [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed, through faith, for faith; as it is written “He who through faith is righteous shall live.... At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I ... began to understand”—i.e., that the righteousness of the faithful is an extension to them of God’s righteousness, given to them in their faith, by God’s grace.... The merciful God justifies us by faith. Here I felt altogether born again.... A totally other side of the Scriptures showed itself to me. I ran through them from memory: The work of God is that which God does in us; the power of God, with which He makes us strong; the wisdom of God, with which He makes us wise; likewise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.... Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to Paradise.”

In other words, he concluded that we do not—we cannot—save ourselves, by good works. To think we can is the utmost arrogance and blasphemy. Only God’s grace, conferred by Christ’s death and

resurrection, can save us—make us “right with God.... The Church and its laws cannot save us.” This struck at the core of the institutionalized and hierarchical Church, and at the whole idea that priests, and even the pope, were mediators between humanity and God. We are always and everywhere directly in the presence of God, *coram Deo.* “Oh, it is a great thing to be a Christian, and to have a hidden life, hidden in God himself, and thus to live in the things of the world, but to feed on Him who appears only in hearing the Word.”

Given his spiritual progress, the immediate and practical provocation of Luther’s rebellion was the doctrine and practice of “indulgences”—in which people could buy reduced time in Purgatory or Hell, for themselves or others, by contributing money to the Church, especially the papacy, for such projects as building St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. This led to thoroughly corrupt scandals—one of the sellers of indulgences in Germany was quoted as saying, “As soon as the coin in the coffer rings, a soul from Purgatory springs.” Here was a conspicuous example of practice not grounded in Scripture, and offensively prominent and unpopular in northern Europe.

So Luther wrote his “95 Theses vs. Indulgences” for scholarly debate, addressed in Latin to fellow scholars and clergy. It was printed—on a poster-sized broadsheet, suitable for nailing to a church door, as a public announcement to the university community. Scholars have quibbled over whether Luther actually nailed it to a door. I believe the evidence favors yes, though the point is contested.

Here enters the technological revolution of printing. In two months the 95 theses, because they were sensational, had been printed in 3 cities, and become quickly known throughout Germany. This was unprecedented. In Basel, Switzerland they were printed as a pamphlet, and in January 1518, in Leipzig, in German. By March Erasmus in England had a copy; he shared it with his friend Thomas More, who passed it on to King Henry VIII, who eventually wrote a reply. Overnight, Luther had become the world’s first media celebrity.

He must have been as surprised as anyone, but he quickly grasped the potential. In February he translated the 95 Theses into a “*Sermon on Indulgences and Grace*”, in German and directed to a lay audience, which was printed as the world’s first *Flugschrift*, or flier—20 paragraphs, of 3-4 sentences each, 1500 words, on 8 pages, which could be read aloud (to those who couldn’t read) in 10 minutes. Printers could produce 500 copies/day, which sold out for a quick profit at about the price of a hen. By the end of 1518 there were 13 printed editions and by 1520 there were 25 editions in all the major cities of Germany. Theology had become a public issue*.*

So Luther began energetically to write, and his literary productivity is unequaled. In two years he had become Europe’s most published living author, producing 30 titles, printed in 370 editions (291 in Germany) of over 350,000 copies. In five years he was the most published author of all time. By 1525 he had published almost twice as much as the next seventeen most prolific authors —1,465 titles to their 807. Nearly half of his first 45 works were in German; 21 were *Flugschriften*, 8pp. or less. In the 30 years to his death in 1546, he produced 544 separate titles—about one every three weeks. In 1523, his most productive year, he published 55 titles—more than one each week—in 390 separate editions. He had become the spiritual leader of Germany.

This quantitative data was published only two years ago, with the contention that he himself led the organization and mobilization of a dedicated printing industry in Wittenberg and elsewhere. The sequence and content of his voluminous writings have been well known. What scholars have not done yet, but I think we can do now, is to connect those points—to see that, and how, Luther himself planned, strategized, and led both the media and the messages that together overwhelmed his opponents and accomplished his Reformation.

At first he intended to reform the Church, beginning with a scholarly debate over one of its most conspicuous corruptions, the sale of indulgences. But because Germany itself was completely decentralized and uncontrollable, in over 300 independent cities and principalities, printing was entirely unregulated, and driven by the profit motives of independent small business publishers; the academic

debate jumped the fence, got completely out of hand, and became a public issue, which Luther could then manage, which he did.

He soon discovered that the Church, from Germany to Rome, had no interest in reforming itself. To the authorities the only question was whether or not Luther was a heretic, an outlaw to be tried and convicted, and if he did not recant, to be burned. In his first debate, in 1518, he challenged his opponent simply to show him where he was wrong, and he would recant. He easily won that exchange. His next opponent skillfully drew him out on the theological ramifications of his position, which were clearly heretical. At that point Luther gave up on reforming the Church, concluding that it was hopelessly serving the Devil. So he decided to appeal instead to the lay public of ordinary Christians. Accordingly, in 1520 he published in rapid succession three major treatises, addressed to specific, strategically significant, constituencies.

In August, an *Address to the Christian Nobility*, written in German and based on Scripture, argued that since Popes and Councils had failed to reform the Church, secular governments had to step up and do it. Pitting the secular powers in Germany against the foreign powers of the Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope, he reinforced that xenophobic argument with what he called the “priesthood of all believers.” The elaborate hierarchical, clerical structure of the Church, he said, was an arrogant pretense not found in the Bible. The first printing of 4,000 copies sold out in two weeks, an unprecedented effect, leading to 10 subsequent editions.

Two months later, in October, he published *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, addressed to the clergy in Latin, also based on Scripture, attacking the Church’s clerical hierarchy and ecclesiology, and asserting the “priesthood of all believers.” Christians originally and authentically approached God directly and individually, in faith. He explicitly denied transubstantiation—that priests miraculously transmute the eucharistic bread and wine into the actual body and blood of Christ. He also denied the validity of the entire penitential system.

The next month, in November, he published *On the Freedom of a Christian*, addressed to both clergy and laity, in both Latin and German, summarizing his new theology: *sola fide* (salvation is by faith alone)*, sola scriptura* (that Scriptural authority alone can justify Christian principals and practices)*,* and the priesthood of all believers. Christians are freed from reliance on works and all externalities; their salvation depends only on personal faith. Christ has justified us; we need only to accept his free and gracious gift. We are righteous because He was righteous. We are still sinners, and we seek to please God with our good works, out of gratitude. We are free, not to do as we please, but as God pleases— there needs to be no mediator between ourselves and God.

Within two months— January 3, 1521—Luther was formally declared a heretic and excommunicated. But as his danger increased, so—for that reason—did his confidence. He felt that he was dealing with the powers of Anti-Christ, that he was probably going to be martyred, so that he had nothing to lose.

The Emperor ordered him to appear, under a safe-conduct pass, at the next Diet in the city of Worms in April, 1521, to answer the charges against him. His progress to Worms was a triumphal procession, with huge supporting crowds cheering him all along the way. There he was asked if he had written about 40 publications (in the last three years!) stacked upon a table, and would he recant, yes or no? He replied, basically, Can I get back to you on that? And they gave him 24 hours. The following day, April 18,1521, he made his famous statement, “Here I stand, I can do no other. My conscience has been taken captive by the Word of God, and I am neither able nor willing to recant, since it is neither safe nor right to act against conscience. God help me, Amen.”

On his trip home he was asked how he felt, and he cited Gamaliel from the Book of Acts: either this is God’s work, or man’s; if God’s, it will win, if man’s, nothing can save it. For his protection he was then “kidnapped” by some knights of Frederick the Wise, his prince the Elector of Saxony, and spirited away to the tower of a remote castle, the Wartburg, where he spent the next ten months in anonymity. He grew out his hair to eliminate his tonsure, grew a beard, and became known as “Knight George.”

While there, he took the next step, translating into German Erasmus’ recent critical edition of the *New Testament* in Greek, superseding the badly flawed 4th-century Latin text of St. Jerome. This was another sensation—the first printing of 3,000, and second printing of 2,000, sold out in weeks. Suddenly 5,000 printed editions of the *New Testament* were disseminated to churches and homes throughout Germany. The new authority on proper Christian belief and practice had become immediately and directly available to everyone.

Next, to help teach his alternative theology to the public, most of whom could not read, Luther mobilized music for worship services, introducing for the first time the practice of having congregations sing hymns in church—another medium, this time original, to promote his Reformation.

“Music is a gift of God. It drives away the Devil and makes people gay...Next after theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor...as the mistress and governess of the feelings of the human heart. We know that to the devils music is distasteful and insufferable. My heart bubbles up and overflows in response to music, which has so often refreshed me....”

He wrote words and tunes to 36 hymns and urged friends to translate the *Psalms* and other texts into hymns. In 1524 he published the first hymnal, of which there were over 1,000 editions and over a million copies in the 16th century.

He also mobilized the spoken word to teach theology, introducing to church services the medium of preaching sermons. Luther himself preached several times every week, and to guide parish clergy he published his sermons in German as *Flugschriften*.

In the mid-1520s various challenges arose, which continued off and on until his death twenty years later, in 1546. The first Lutheran martyrs were two boys burned in Brussels; Luther composed a musical ballad to commemorate their witness. A massive rebellion of peasants, the largest until the French Revolution, claimed Luther as one of their inspirations, and he was forced to choose one side or the other. He opted to protect his own movement by siding with the principalities, and wrote a violent attack against the rebellion, invoking Scripture. Erasmus finally declared himself on the side of the Church and against Luther’s reforms, with a treatise “On Free Will” supporting the value of works for salvation, against which Luther responded. The papacy and the Empire finally joined forces, spurred by the increasing threat from Turkish invaders approaching Vienna. And the reformation itself spun wildly out of control, as strange new cults sprang up in northern Europe, featuring all manner of scandalous behavior such as weeklong “retreats”, of which it was said that more souls were begotten than were saved. Historians have designated these movements the “radical”, as distinct from the “magisterial” Reformations. Some of them (e.g. Mennonites) are still with us today.

In 1526 there was some good news: Luther married Katarina von Bora, a former nun. They enjoyed an apparently wonderful domestic life—she was an excellent manager of his large household’s affairs, and they had six children. He wrote what a pleasure it was to wake up in the morning and see “pigtails on the pillow next to mine."

1527 was a horrible year. The plague returned to Wittenberg, and Luther and Katie remained in town to care for the sick and dying. One friend was martyred, and another was murdered; Luther’s own health deteriorated—one day he collapsed in the pulpit. His *Anfechtungen* returned, he felt he had lost Christ and was slipping into the Devil’s grasp, and that he was going to die. As a pastoral comfort to himself and his large body of endangered followers for whom he felt responsible, he wrote his most famous hymn, *Ein Feste Burg*, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God”, based on *Psalm* 46. "Burg" might also be translated as "City", following Augustine. Try to read the words and the music from Luther’s point of view, to understand what he was saying and why.

A mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing:

Our helper He, amid the flood, Of mortal ills prevailing.

For still our ancient foe, Doth seek to work his woe;

His craft and power are great, And armed with cruel hate,

On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing;

Were not the right Man on our side, The Man of God's own choosing.

Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is he;

Lord Sabaoth is his name, From age to age the same,

And He must win the battle.

And though this world, with devils filled, Should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God hath willed, His truth to triumph through us.

The Prince of Darkness grim, We tremble not for him;

His rage we can endure, For lo! His doom is sure—

One little word will fell him.

The remaining years of his life were difficult, as his health continued to deteriorate, and his troubles to multiply. In 1529 he published two Catechisms, teaching his theology—a long one for clergy and a short one for laity, including children. At a meeting of the Diet in Speyer in 1529, the Emperor and the Pope concluded an alliance against the Reformers, against which a number of princes declared their opposition, writing in response a “Protestation”—which gave to the Reformation its name “Protesxtant.” In 1534 Luther completed his German translation of the Bible with the *Old Testament*, the publication a huge logistical undertaking, that shaped the future of the German language much as the King James Version of the Bible shaped modern English. In the 16th century there were 4,790 editions of his works, 90% of them in Germany, 80% in German.

So to summarize: Luther’s greatest accomplishments were: First, to struggle through his own spiritual crisis to achieve a profound insight, based on Scripture: that the Christian religion is essentially spiritual—grounded not in external works and institutions, but in personal existential faith—as Paul Tillich phrased it in this century, “ultimate concern, which qualifies all other concerns”, extended to us by God as a gracious gift. Second, that we are directly connected to God with no need for institutional intermediaries. Third, he identified fundamental flaws and corruption in the Church of his time, based on Scriptural authority, and brought them to professional, and then public, attention. Fourth, when he learned that the Church did not care whether he was right or wrong, but only whether he was a heretic, he conceived and executed a revolutionary strategy based on the technological revolution in printing, to defeat the Church despite the opposition of both pope and emperor, by appealing directly to the public in new media—by his unprecedented volume of publications, by translating and disseminating the Bible itself in German, by preaching, and by singing of hymns, to teach his revolutionary theology and to renew the Christian faith among Christians. Fifth, he was victorious in Germany, his doctrines spread to the rest of Europe, and Christendom has never been the same since. Sixth, his shattering of the medieval unity of Christendom was combined with other contemporaneous paradigm-shifts—the Renaissance, the Scientific Revolution, the global voyages of discovery, the rise of secular philosophies, national monarchies, and the Enlightenment—to produce modern Western cultural history. Today we are living in another Age of Paradigm-Shifts, but our religious lives still persist in the wake of Luther’s leadership.

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**V. Harvesting the English Reformation: William Tyndale**

St. Dunstan’s Episcopal Church, Dover MA, October 2018

**Why “Harvesting”?** Our focus here on the English Reformation, rather than treating all the individual Protestant Reformations (e.g., the "mainstream" "magisterial" reformations—Calvinist, Baptist, Methodist, *et al.*; and "radical" reformations—e.g., anabaptist, Puritan, Mennonite, *et al.*), is forced by lack of space and insignificant differences to the central themes of this book. Anglicanism as defined originally and authoritatively by Richard Hooker distinguished between characteristics "necessary", and those that are "indifferent", to salvation. Anglicanism, he said, had no distinctive doctrines or practices that it considered "necessary." All its distinctive attributes were functions of historical differences in time and place, rather than fundamental features necessary to salvation.

I have chosen the metaphor of “harvesting” because this brief history of our religion needs to be highly selective, gleaning from all the complex and confusing things that happened the most useful parts of the English Reformation for our lives as Christians today.

It is safe to say that very few people, even among Episcopalians, know much more about the English Reformation than a few lurid details—partly because it was so complex, necessarily happening in various levels and pockets of society, and partly owing to England’s uniqueness in the larger European Reformation. She had unusually strong government, which tightly controlled her nascent printing and publishing enterprises, which therefore lagged behind their counterparts on the Continent. She had several strong individual leaders who inclined in various directions. Accordingly, she lacked a single, clear narrative thread like Luther's, on which to hang the story. Instead, there were several loosely connected stories unfolding simultaneously and individually, so that even historians writing books have had a hard time presenting a clear, coherent, comprehensive narrative. Nonetheless, the English Reformation's development as an historical phenomenon has an overall logic. We shall focus here on what modern Christians can use, while outlining the historical logic—its orderly unfolding.

All of which, however, raises a question: Why do we care? Does this history really matter? The big picture is, as we all know, that the Judeo-Christian religious tradition is itself distinctive in its emphasis on the history of God’s relations with the world, originating in ancient Hebrew monotheism. If there is only one God, who is "Almighty" in the sense that "all power is of God" who governs the whole world, then everything that happens—materially and historically, starting with the Creation—tells the story of that ordering power, and is significant to us in revealing who God is and how we fit into His order. The *Old* and *New Testaments* are therefore historical narratives. St. Augustine’s early 5th century *City of God*, marking the transition from Classical to Christian civilization and shaping medieval cultural history, was written to explain God’s relation to history, particularly how and why the Fall of Rome was not caused by Christianity but could be understood from a Christian historical perspective. The Renaissance in the 14th to 16th centuries, revived the critical study of history, especially with Christian Humanism which recovered and examined documentary sources in the early history of our religion; that historical work then became a major cause of the Reformations, which consisted in attempts to set that history straight.

We are therefore beneficiary legatees of this characteristically historical tradition, so it is only natural that we also should study the history of Christianity, and the Anglican tradition’s unique history within that, asking whether the English Reformation produced anything significant for us, that we can legitimately value, enriching our lives and in particular our spiritual lives.

**Background:** There was a buildup to the Reformation in the Late Middle Ages—a growing antagonism between the Roman Catholic Church and the peoples of northern Europe, especially over matters of conspicuous corruption like the sale of indulgences. We also noted the “Christian Humanism” of the Renaissance, with its critical examination of ancient religious and even Biblical texts in Latin and esp. Greek and Hebrew, revealed the original simplicity of early Christianity and its sharp contrast with the later Church’s increasing pursuit of Earthly City political power and moral corruption. So the Reformation itself began with, and was in part caused by, historical research. Then when Luther learned at the Diet of Worms in 1521 that the Church was not interested in reforming itself, but only in whether

or not he was a heretic, he concluded that the papacy must be Antichristian, and that God would judge who was right and who was wrong.

That was in 1521, four years after Luther had originally posted his 95 Theses. Meanwhile in England, leading Christian humanists—Erasmus, John Colet, Sir Thomas More—also questioned the legitimacy of Church doctrines and practices. The official Vulgate Latin *Bible*, a 4th century translation by St. Jerome from Greek and Hebrew sources then available to him, was increasingly criticized as older and better sources were discovered. The *Bible*, however, was not widely known or valued by the general public—they only had snippets from it in the Mass, in Latin. Christian Humanists read the whole *Bible* in original Greek and Hebrew from superior earlier texts, which uncovered its fundamental historical significance. In 1505 Erasmus published a critique of the Vulgate translation; John Colet loaned him some superior Greek texts from English libraries, which Erasmus then used to produce in 1516 a bi-lingual critical edition of the *New Testament* in Greek and corrected Latin. It was printed on the Continent, in Basel, because the small number of English printers in London were government-regulated and prevented from causing trouble. A second volume of *Notes* by Erasmus pointedly contrasted the contemporary Church with the Early Christian "congregations"—before there was a "Church"—in Jerusalem and around the Mediterranean world, as reported in the Gospels, Paul's Epistles, and the *Book of Acts*. Erasmus called for the Scriptures to be translated into vernacular languages. His edition was an immediate publishing sensation throughout Europe—in 1522 Luther published his German translation, in 1523 Lefevre d’Étaples published a French translation, and in 1526 a young English scholar named William Tyndale published anonymously, on the Continent, the first major English translation of the *New Testament*. This was the catalytic game-changer for Britain.

**Recognizing A Hero: William Tyndale, the English Reformation's Luther, and His English Bible:**

The English Reformation followed closely the example of the Lutheran German Reformation, and also had a leader, its own "Luther", a great man whose name we should all now remember: William Tyndale (1494-1536).

Tyndale has not been fully appreciated for several reasons: first, he had a short life—he was burned in 1536 at age 42; second, he had left England for good in 1524, when he was 30, and spent the last 12 years of his life on the Continent, moving around, often under cover to avoid capture; third, as a result we have almost no documentary sources from or about him; fourth, he did not have a conspicuous personality—he was a shy, modest and retiring man; and fifth, his main productivity was literary, not dramatic deeds or events.

But: Thomas More, no less, called him “the captain of the reformation in England.” A “captain” or commanding leader—really? Why?

Freshly equipped with the recent discoveries about how Luther's Reformation succeeded by his weaponizing the technological revolution in printing with a calculated strategic attack on the established Church, and intentionally leading the German Reformation, it is notable that Tyndale’s work was strikingly similar, also suggesting a calculated strategy, perhaps following Luther’s example, perhaps even learned from Luther himself.

We know that when Tyndale arrived on the Continent in 1524, when Luther's Reformation was in high gear, he travelled to publishing centers with his nearly completed *New Testament* translation in hand. We know that he went to Germany, and scholars have suggested that he may have gone to Wittenberg, the capitol of the new Reformation, which was a very popular thing to do in those days. If so he could scarcely have avoided meeting Luther, since Wittenberg was not a large city and Luther was at that point its most prominent citizen. In sum, it is all but certain that they met, in which case it is fairly obvious what they talked about.

Is there any evidence? First, the close parallels of Tyndale's subsequent work with Luther’s leading example.

Tyndale launched his initiative in 1526 by publishing anonymously, in Worms, his English translation of the *New Testament*. It was clearly intended for potent and thus covert mass distribution, which required

elaborate planning and organization—printed anonymously, in pocket hymnbook-size, 700 pp., 3-6,000 copies, smuggled and secretly distributed into England.

Second, this was in fact the catalyst which precipitated the English Reformation—a game-changer, empowering everything that followed. By 1530, in only four years, there were 6 more editions, in an elaborately organized scheme: an estimated 15,000 copies, strategically distributed underground in England to universities, cities and beyond.

Third, moreover, like Luther, Tyndale was an eloquent writer, which he used intentionally—his translation was so well and beautifully done, as we see in our Scriptures today, that all subsequent *Bibles* in English have descended from his.

Fourth, he quickly followed that, also in 1526, by printing separately and in easily smuggled sheets, a brief *Prologue*—note the title—the first English Protestant tract, aggressively attacking the Church and drawn directly from Luther's similar tract, with basic though modified Lutheran ideas, presenting his own theology. Furthermore, it was effective—the Council of Bishops condemned it and Cardinal Wolsey had it burned.

In 1528 Tyndale moved to Antwerp, a printing center where he could live with collaborating English merchants in an “English House.” There he printed two strategically aimed treatises: *The Parable of the Wicked Mammon,* expanding on the *Prologue—*pocket-sized, loosely based on a Luther sermon on the *New Testament*, teaching that salvation is by faith more than works; and *On the Obedience of a Christian Man*, clearly aimed at Henry VIII and arguing as Luther had that secular rulers needed to assume leadership against the pope to reform the Church.

As with Luther’s *Address to the Christian Nobility,* Tyndale’s tract was politically successful—Anne Boleyn, who had caught Henry VIII’s wandering eye in 1525-6, and whose family opposed Wolsey because he was opposing Anne, received a copy, read and annotated it, and in 1528 gave it to the King, who was already alienated from the Medici pope and cousin of Queen Catherine. Henry predictably liked it a lot, and said every ruler should read it. He even invited Tyndale back to England, guaranteeing his safety. But Tyndale was skeptical and set strong preconditions: that if the King would authorize a Bible in English, he would not write any more polemics. Eventually he declined to return, for reasons of safety.

But the genie was out of the bottle. His translation was a huge popular success. He had coined many words and phrases we still use today: “passover”, “scapegoat”, “my brother’s keeper”, “seek and ye shall find”; “judge ye not that ye be not judged”; “let there be light”; “salt of the earth”; “signs of the times”; “the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”—the list is endless. His translated words became common coinage used to promote the Reformation: "church" became "congregation"; "priest" became "elder"; "penance" became "repentance." Scholars have found that 94% of the King James *Bible* was his, whence it shaped modern English language.

To make a long story short, Thomas More and others pursued him on the Continent, he was eventually discovered and arrested in Brussels, tried for heresy, and burned, in 1536. Throughout his ordeal he was notably passive, never trying to escape, as if resigned, Christ-like, to martyrdom. His last words at the stake were to cry out: “Lord! Open the King of England’s eyes!”

**Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556):** This brings us to the official English Reformation, involving the Crown, Parliament, and the Church hierarchy. Because the government was relatively strong, in a relatively compact and insular realm, any major developments required official support—from the King, leading families, Parliament, and the Church. This was the political history of the Reformation, not edifying for us today as we separate wheat from chaff in harvesting what we can use.

Here the hero is Thomas Cranmer—Archbishop of Canterbury from 1532 to 1556, a 24-year long tenure, the man on the spot in the most crucial period of the English Reformation. Cranmer conceived and wrote the *Book of Common Prayer,* much of which we use today, first published in 1549—470 years ago.

Cranmer was trained to be a scholar—he was a prominent professor at Cambridge University, and when he died in 1556 he had the largest personal library in England. He was exceptionally intelligent and serious, but also amiable, articulate, hard-working, diplomatic, and like Tyndale he wrote beautifully. In 1518, at age 30, when Luther’s reformation had just begun and before Tyndale's translation, Cranmer turned to Biblical studies as a Christian Humanist. He built an eminent reputation—in 1527 he was 1 of 12 scholars chosen to debate King Henry’s marital issues. He was so persuasive that he was sent abroad to recruit Continental scholars to the cause. There he met the Pope and the leading Continental reformers. He took on writing assignments for the King's divorce, developing expertise in canon law. In 1532 (at age 43) he was named Archbishop of Canterbury, as the candidate favored by the Boleyns, who were of course inclined toward reformation.

But how was a Protestant Reformation to be accomplished, in 16th century England? This was the question Tyndale must have discussed with Luther. It was one thing for a powerful ruler to coerce leading nobles and institutions to a rebellious cause, but quite another to effect a change in an entire nation's popular religion, in a strongly religious culture, with not very powerful forces and tightly controlled printing technology. This required leadership, and among the number of leading figures in England Thomas Cranmer's decisive contribution, then and to us, was the *Book of Common Prayer,* which he conceived, wrote, and had published by authorization of Parliament in 1549, in the brief reign (1547-1553) of Henry's young son and successor Edward VI.

Cranmer conceived it as a tool to teach the new doctrines and forms of worship, thereby to promote religious and civil uniformity and commonality. It followed the general structure of the Catholic Missal, with modifications and enhancements—for example, the word “Mass” became “Holy Communion”; salvation comes by faith not works; we are saved by Christ’s one true sacrifice for all, and by the power of common prayer.

Cranmer also introduced two superb innovations unique to the Anglican tradition: the service of Choral Evensong, and the Collects—brief gem-like prayers, of which he wrote 96. In today's *Prayer Book* 24 are entirely his, including the opening “Collect for Purity” which is said every Sunday:

ALMIGHTY God, unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy Name; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

 Others he adapted, mainly from Scripture. The Lord's Prayer is his wording, as are the words of administering the sacrament. His marriage liturgy is much warmer—from the purpose being to avoid sin and beget children to “for the mutual society, help and comfort that each ought to have of the other, in both prosperity and adversity.”

But then King Edward died at age 16 in 1553, and was succeeded by his stepsister, later known as "Bloody" Mary, Catholic daughter of Henry and his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Cranmer's fateful hour had come—he had humiliated her mother, ruined Mary’s own life, and worked to extirpate the religion she loved. He defended the *Prayer Book* as sanctioned by Parliament and “more pure and according to God’s Word than any other that hath been used in England these thousand years.” Nonetheless he was arrested, confined in the Tower of London, stood trial for treason, pleaded guilty, and was condemned to death. He was forced to witness two burnings of prominent Protestants and was horrified; he recanted twice but on his last day, in a final sermon, he recanted those. At the stake he put his hand that had signed the recantations into the fire.

His legacy to us, therefore, is our liturgy, raising our consciousness every Sunday. Much of it was originally written to distinguish Protestant theology from Catholicism, to get the English on same page religiously. Every word served that end—clearly and precisely defining what Anglicans believe. Though not a systematic philosopher, Cranmer was a deeply religious leader, a precise thinker and an eloquent spokesperson.

**Queen Elizabeth I and the Elizabethan Settlement: 1559-1603.** The English Reformation predictably followed the pattern of those on the Continent, soon proliferating and fragmenting into a wide variety

of beliefs, from conservative Catholics to radical, iconoclastic Protestants. Into this maelstrom in 1559 came Queen Elizabeth I, who adroitly—sensitively, intelligently and steadfastly— brought the English Reformation to a stable climax in her "Elizabethan Settlement."

The daughter of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, her childhood and upbringing was fraught with dangers from all sides, which she managed to elude with increasing skill. She had no choice but to be extremely complex politically, with a finely tuned sense of diplomacy, seasoned with irony and humor, during the forth-and-back reigns of Edward VI (1547-1553) and "Bloody" Mary (1553-1559). She was deeply religious, as well as highly intelligent and well-educated—she read every day from Erasmus’ Greek *New Testament*.

She ascended to the throne, or the crown descended upon her, in 1559 when she was 25 years old. Her reign was long—until 1603. Known to posterity as the "Virgin Queen", Elizabeth steadfastly resisted considerable political pressures to marry—either to gain an alliance with a suitable foreign monarch as Mary had done (with Spain's Phillip II), or to choose among the powerful families of Britain for domestic protection. Either way would have diluted her power, so she did neither. In public policy her highest priorities were necessarily—especially because she was a single woman—to establish and maintain political and religious peace and order, to avoid the Wars of Religion suffered on the Continent. This required a constant and confident balancing act among competing parties. In the year of her accession Parliament passed, with some difficulty, an Act of Supremacy making her supreme "governor" (not "head", as Henry had it) of the Church of England, and an Act of Uniformity, which decreed that everyone in the realm was to attend church and worship uniformly on Sundays and holy days. The Act wisely stopped short of requiring what her subjects might personally and privately believe. The *Book of Common Prayer* was diplomatically softened.

The bottom line is that, with bumps along the way, she succeeded. The value of the Elizabethan Settlement for us is that it established our ancestral Church of England, and on a broadly tolerant, non-disputatious, base known as the "*via media"*—"middle way"—between Roman Catholicism on the right, and the growing Puritanism on the left. Its central theme was to cease pointless, contentious, violent, wrangling over doctrines, and simply to get on with daily life—one's personal Christian life and salvation under the social and political covering ideal of a "Christian commonwealth." England was thus successfully spared the 16th-century civil wars of religion on the Continent.

**Richard Hooker (1554-1600) and the *Via Media:***

A key contributor to that result was Richard Hooker (1554-1600), a quiet, modest parish priest and scholar who wrote what is today still considered the definitive description and defense of Anglicanism and the "middle way" of the Church of England. His masterwork in nine books is entitled *On the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity,* published from 1593 to 1597*.* We shall treat that work in detail in the next chapter; here we focus more on his life and role in the unfolding English Reformation.

Born into a reasonably well-connected but not noble family, and well-educated, Hooker was intellectually brilliant, immensely erudite and scholarly with a conspicuously clear, orderly mind. He was a parish priest, not a charismatic religious or official leader. He became Anglicanism's first systematic theologian. As an Aristotelian Christian he believed that virtue consists in moderation between extremes—e.g., courage, between foolhardiness and cowardice. At a time of violence in religion, his moderation and intellectual brilliance caught the attention of Queen Elizabeth who shared both, and so in 1585 (at age 31) he was appointed to the most prestigious and influential pulpit in England as Master of Temple Church in the heart of London. His congregation was influential—courtiers, members of Parliament, the legal establishment and men of affairs. As a married man with no doctorate, he could not rise higher in the Church, but in his new post he was frequently called upon to respond for the Crown to critics of the Church from the growing radical Puritan left, who wanted to strip the Church down to its nascent form in the Gospels. He found their arguments foolish, and so felt compelled to write a definitive defense of the newly established Church of England. He retired to a rural parish, and in 1589 began composing his masterpiece, a definitive *apologia* for Anglicanism, published from 1593-1597*.* He died in 1600.

What Hooker contributed to the English Reformation and to us was a carefully reasoned defense of Tyndale's, Cranmer's, and Elizabeth's efforts at a course-correction for the continuing history of Christianity at a time of profound and tumultuous religious conflicts. Whereas Cranmer in his *Book of Common Prayer* had been most concerned to distinguish Protestant theology and worship from Catholicism, Hooker fifty years later was most concerned to defend Anglicanism from the emerging radical left—in England, Puritanism. His solution characteristically was a "*via media*"—a moderate "middle way" in early-modern Christianity. Hooker was ahead of his time inadvocating religious toleration and peace among all parties, including Catholics.

His "middle way" was based on four principles:

— First, truth in religion is to be found not only in Church tradition (the Roman Catholic priority), nor only in Scripture (the Puritan priority), but in both of those as further qualified by "reason", or common sense. He thought this "three-legged stool" was needed because as a matter of practical fact and experience (common sense) neither of the first two was working well.

— Second, the purpose of religion is salvation—living in harmony with God's holy governance of all Creation, in thought and practice. But since not everything is of equal value for salvation, we must distinguish between those things that are necessary and those that are "indifferent."

—Third, our practical pursuit of religious life depends on our continual participation in the Sacraments—starting with Baptism (and Confirmation) and continuing faithfully with the Eucharist. And

—Fourth, with humility and skepticism we cannot know what is ultimate truth nor who is or is not saved; therefore as long as people conform outwardly to the “customs of our religious practice”, what they believe in their hearts is no one else’s business. “Let us not try to unscrew the inscrutable.”

 **The King James *Bible* (1611): Concluding the Harvest:**

When Elizabeth died in 1603, the crown devolved from the Tudor to the Stuart dynasty of Scotland, through highly complex patrilineage. King James VI of Scotland was the great-great grandson of Henry VII (Tudor), so he became King James I of England. He has been treated harshly by historians for his many eccentricities, though more respectfully in recent years. He was undoubtedly a serious intellectual and scholar, following Elizabeth's policy of wanting peace for his realms despite civil unrest and foreign wars of religion.

To help unify and pacify his people, he chose the same technology as Cranmer had—to authorize an official up-to-date common English edition of the Bible. To ensure its authentic representation of the people as a whole, the editorial work was divided among 9 committees of 6 persons each, carefully chosen for scholarly, religious, institutional, and geographic representative balance and breadth. Each committee was assigned a portion of the whole; their parts were assembled and reviewed by a small group of experts, to produce a coherent book. Their goal was to achieve the best consensus of the whole of England’s understanding of the Word of God speaking to them—not in everyday vernacular expressions as we attempt today, but in exalted, ennobling, and authoritative English, worthy of the divine Speaker.

The work was begun in 1604, approved by Parliament and published in 1611, distributed to and required to be used by every parish in the realm. It quickly became the most powerful influence on modern English language, helping to create an epoch of great English literature. Its value for us is the beauty of its holiness, etched in our brains from childhood, compared with any later translation.

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**Conclusion:** What, then, are our harvest gleanings?

— First, that the English Reformation. did indeed have a Luther-equivalent, and his name was William Tyndale, its instigator and strategic leader—"Captain", as Thomas More put it—whose powerful

influence came from his English translation of the *Bible* and seems to have followed Luther's leading example in subsequent strategically conceived publications.

— Second, our principal legacies are literary: William Tyndale’s *New Testament*; Thomas Cranmer’s *Book of Common Prayer;* Richard Hooker’s *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* defending the *via media*; and the King James *Bible*.

— Third, what the English Reformation accomplished for the historical development of Christianity was, as with other Protestant Reformations, a pruning away of irreligious medieval institutional accretions—an intentional cleansing return to more authentic historical roots in the early Church's thought, worship, and practice. This gain was consolidated by the Elizabethan Settlement, and rationally justified by Hooker.

—Fourth, given that intrinsic to our religion is the belief that history is a significant indicator of God's will, and helps us to understand it better, we see from this brief history that the English Reformation began spiritually, was necessarily institutionalized politically, developed its own liturgy, theology and art, and was established both civilly and religiously by great political and intellectual leadership, predicated upon a "middle way" between contentious ideological extremes, distinguishing between what is essential to personal salvation and what is indifferent, what is knowable and what is not knowable, all in a spirit of moderation and religious toleration. In today's secular—fragmented, polarized—world, the value of these lessons is enhanced.

—Fifth, the bottom line: when we worship today we are joining and participating in a rich historical tradition that has proven capable to inform and nourish our spiritual life and practice.

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**VI. Richard Hooker's Anglicanism**

**St. Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Dover MA, November 2019**

**Overview: Richard Hooker and the *Via Media.*** This chapter provides a closer analysis of Hooker's Anglicanism, as laid down in Book V of his magisterial 9-volume *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*. Since its publication in 1597 it has been regarded as the most thorough and authoritative description ever written of Anglican doctrine and practices. Hooker was most particularly addressing Puritanism. His argument was rigorously logical and systematic:

Book I began, as did the creeds and liturgy, with the fundamental assertion that God is the *Logos—*the Creator and Governor over the order, harmony, and reasonableness of Creation. Hooker did not use that Greek word, but as he expressed it to his 16th-century countrymen, God is "the Supreme...Monarch of the whole world." All civic virtue, goodness and well-being are therefore ontologically derived from the ordering power of the *Logos,* in which the entire world is unified as a tightly coherent whole:

God hath created nothing simply for itself.... Each part... ha[s] such an interest in the others that in the whole world nothing is found whereunto any thing created can say, 'I need thee not.'"

Book II established that Scripture is not the only source of truth or law (the Puritan position) because as common sense tells us, many laws participate in the divine governance of Creation and yet are not found in Scripture.

Book III was his plea for religious toleration, predicated on his distinction between things necessary and things “indifferent” for salvation. Among the latter are how churches should be governed, which as common sense tells us varies with time and place.

Book IV argued that although fundamental doctrine cannot change, the laws of the Church have often changed to accord with whatever form of Church government the people and the Church have wanted.

Book V then (published 1597) took the next step, connecting civic virtue in a Christian commonwealth to the *Book of Common Prayer*—this was how Hooker created the Anglican tradition. This book is well-known today, still taught in our seminaries.No other treatise has had a more profound influence on the spiritual life of Anglicans. It extends the basic spirit begun by Tyndale and Cranmer in a detailed justification of the worship service in the *Book of Common Prayer*. It explains why we have common prayers, why we use psalms and litanies, why it is accepted to enjoy church music, beautiful sanctuaries and clerical vestments, and why sermons are less important than common prayer and sacraments.

Common prayer, he wrote, is the essence of the Anglican Church. It goes far beyond individual prayer, because it embodies our collective response to Christ’s sacrifice for all who believe in Him. It is the common voice of the whole people ascending to God—the only way England could be a Christian commonwealth.

“True religion is the root of all true virtues, and the stay of well-ordered commonwealths. Let polity acknowledge itself indebted to religion; godliness being the top and wellspring of all true virtues. Religion and justice are naturally united—there is neither where both are not."

**Premises:**

His philosophical grounding was classically Aristotelian, from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics,* which defined virtue as the "Golden Mean" between extremes, which are vices (e.g., “courage” as midway between foolhardiness and cowardice). This coincided with Elizabeth's spirit and the emerging Church of England, a new kind of Christian commonwealth, based on common-sense reason and toleration in a bitterly and violently conflicted world.

**Faith** he defined as not merely intellectual—knowledge unsupported by evidence—but what we today would call existential—belief or total commitment in both thought and action.

**Common prayer**, he said, is the essential and distinguishing characteristic of the Anglican Church; its liturgy is an active communication between the Celebrant, the congregation as a whole, and Almighty God. In an age when society and polity lacked effective law enforcement, religion was intended to be a primary ordering agent; there was practical benefit for a community to gather together regularly in worship and prayer.

Moreover, common prayer, Hooker said, is generally superior to private prayer, because it is "hallowed by long use" rather than depending on any one person's spontaneous and extemporaneous wit at any given moment. It gives us much greater assurance than when we pray in private, and the good that is done is greater than that of private prayer; "the whole Church is improved by our good example."

Furthermore, common prayer is also more appropriate—it is the common voice of the whole people ascending to God, the ordering power over all the universe. It embodies our communal response to Christ’s sacrifice for all who believe in Him. This was the only way England could be, as it must be, a "Christian commonwealth."

In prayer we acknowledge God to be our "sovereign good", our "supreme truth." Prayer testifies to our "dutiful affection." "Our religious life begins and ends with prayer." A church is a "house of prayer." A sanctuary's principal reason for existence is common prayer; its appropriate structure and furnishings "frame our affections." Hymns are also common prayers.

**Churches**—why do we have them? They are "Christ's school." Why church buildings? We build and set them aside from ordinary uses for a special purpose: the teaching and worship of Almighty God. Why are they dedicated? They are dedicated to God as the sole owner, in "reverence and affection." We name them—e.g., St. Dunstan's—to remind us of their purpose and values. We furnish them well to honor their use. Clerical vestments, however, which Puritans ridiculed, are indifferent to salvation, only a matter of form—not to signify greater holiness but simply to beautify solemn actions, especially the Sacraments and Holy Communion. But they are not worth getting worked up about—they are a matter of decorum, not of salvation.

**Incarnation and Salvation**, he said, are the "central articles of the Christian faith, the ground of all our beliefs." He based his argument on narrative, rather than philosophical, theology—an eloquent and persuasive story, apart from empirical evidence and logic. God created the world and saw that it was good. But Man and Creation fell into sin, and consequently death. God could not let that destroy His Creation, so to reconcile us to Him, to redeem us from our sinful nature, He effected our salvation—the re-"union of our souls with God", by humbling Himself and assuming human form, including death, which He suffered and overcame by resurrection. This miraculous cosmic result could come by no other way. We cannot understand how it happened.

**The Eucharist:** We cannot know how the sacrament works, any more than we can understand incarnation. It actually “worketh salvation.” How can we know it works? Not by debating the issue, but by experiencing God’s grace through participating in the liturgy. Evidence of its effectiveness is not what happens physically to the bread and wine, but our renewed life and spirit that we gain from it. Bread and wine are not physical but moral instruments of salvation. Our performance with them is what makes the miracle work. If we do not faithfully receive the sacraments, there is no holy communion. Our participation is indispensable to the process of Christ’s continuing incarnation in us. Our participation with God and Christ is mutual—we possess each other.

Hooker then proceeded to go through the Eucharistic service in the *Book of Common Prayer*, explaining what each part meant, why it was done, why it was placed as it was in the sequence of parts. Throughout, he was assuming and emphasizing an acute awareness that in worship we are addressing Almighty God, the *Logos* of all Creation. "Everything is done in God's sight."

We begin with Cranmer's masterful **Collect for Purity**—an appropriate starting point because it affirms God's complete power and presence in our lives. Because His power permeates and orders all our being,

we acknowledge that to Him, the *Logos,* "all hearts are open, all desires known, and...no secrets are hid." We then humbly ask for the grace to "perfectly love...and worthily magnify" God's holy name.

Our **demeanor**—the choreography of worship—in church, before Almighty God, is carefully prescribed. In professing faith, we stand, showing strength; in confessing our sins, or seeking God's blessing in prayer, we kneel, showing humility and gratitude; in hearing Christ's words, we stand showing respect; on hearing his name, we bow. Before receiving the sacrament, we question ourselves on our readiness. We kneel when receiving it to express our humility for the grace thus given.

The beauty and power of the ***Psalms*** surpass all other Scripture; therefore, we read them more often than any other part, the better to learn them, and to guide our lives. 'There is no grief or disease that invades the soul of man, no wound or sickness you can name, for which there is not readily to be found in this treasure house an available and comfortable remedy."

**Music** in worship, for which David provided the archetype as "the first to add both vocal and instrumental melody to public prayer in order to lift up our hearts and sweeten our affections towards God", edifies our feelings, and is "conducive to good." "The power and pleasing effect that music has on our souls—the part of us that is most divine—has led some people to conclude that "the very nature of the soul is harmony, or at least that harmony resides within the soul." "It delights all ages and suits all occasions...in it the very image and character of virtue and vice are perceived." Those who are not inspired "must have very dry and rough hearts."

The **Creeds** are "teaching instruments" in "Christ's school." The Apostles' Creed was instituted by Christ and the Apostles to distinguish Christians from Jews and infidels; it held the Church together when it was being dispersed throughout the world. The Nicene Creed, of the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.), summarizes the basic beliefs of Christianity.

The **Sacraments** are God's "instruments of grace", so that observing them is necessary to salvation. "We admire and honor them not so much for the service that we do to God in receiving them, as for the dignity of the sacred and mysterious gift that we receive from God." Their purpose is to signify, display, and represent by outward and visible signs that inward and spiritual divine grace, which effects our salvation—the union of our souls with God.

**Baptism** is our first sacrament in life. The Baptism of infants admits them to life within the family of the Church, into Christ's "school"—not to carry out the work of Christians, but for Christian "formation"— to "lay the foundations of new life." Baptized children are "seasoned with the principles of true religion before malice and corruption deprave their minds." A good foundation is laid thereby for the direction of their entire lives.

The **Eucharist**: "New life" is promised to all Christians; living it is our constant goal. Partakers must have been baptized first, because "no dead thing is capable of nourishment." In the Eucharist we receive that gift from God whereby we know by grace what the grace of God is that we are given. The soul of man is the receptacle of Christ's presence. In Baptism the new life is begun; in Confirmation it is confirmed; in the Eucharist it is consummated—refined and strengthened and made perfect. It “worketh salvation."

But how can we know that? We cannot know how it works, any more than we can understand Incarnation. Certainly not by debating the issue, but by experiencing it—experiencing God’s grace by our personal participation in the liturgy. Evidence of its effectiveness is not what happens physically to the bread and wine, but the renewal of life and spirit that we personally feel that we gain from it. If we do not faithfully receive the sacraments, there is no holy communion. Our participation is indispensable to the process of Christ’s continuing incarnation in us. Our participation with God and Christ is mutual—we possess each other.

Debating how this happens (e.g., by transubstantiation or consubstantiation) is unnecessary and a waste of time; this "heavenly food" is given to us for the filling of our empty souls, and not for exercising "our curiosity and our subtle minds."

Participation, then, is the key to understanding the real presence in the Eucharist, in communion. Christ is present in the heart and soul of the faithful communicant. The effect of Christ in us is a real transforma-

tion of our souls and bodies into righteousness, from death and corruption to immortality and new life. The transformation is the real "body and blood" of Christ, in which He is made wholly ours. "What these elements are in themselves matters not; it is enough that to one who takes them they are the body and blood of Christ."

**Conclusion:** It is generally agreed that Anglicanism has no distinctive theological doctrines. It is deeply traditional, basing its beliefs on Scripture and Creeds, modified by common sense and the distinction between things "necessary" and things "indifferent" to salvation.

Anglicanism's distinction as a religion, therefore, lies notably in the realm of what Hooker considered things "indifferent" to salvation—matters of style more than substance, practices more than beliefs, and above all our liturgy of common prayer. We do not try to "unscrew the inscrutable"; we do not know who is and who isn't saved, or how or why. We are "catholic" in the sense of "universal"—we ordain women, permit birth control and divorce, welcome all comers of whatever gender or loving, etc. And above all we have our liturgical or formal worshipping style of common prayer, based on historic, hallowed, and beautiful texts, music, and a few modern attempts at liturgical literature.

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**VII. Secularization: The World Is Split In Pieces**

Secularization as an historical issue is currently contested among scholars, both as to its definition and its very existence as an historical development. Unfortunately, these are secular scholars working in today's secular culture, whose understanding of religion and Christianity tends to be deeply flawed from their own inexperience and ignorance of it. Here we shall avoid entanglement in distracting issues; we can only note a few of the major points in its rich and complex history that are most relevant to our main subject, which is how Christianity has evolved from its beginnings to the present.

What can explain how it happened that after 1000 years with the Augustinian program promoting Christianity as a culture, it lost its hold on Western civilization and generally retreated, abdicating its cultural leadership? Or more generally, how a culture evolves from religion to secularity, especially if religion is grounded in truth? We shall see that what changed was the phenomenal world and people's minds and sensibilities, which will be our focus here—what was gained and lost in that transition, how it happened, and what made it seem worthwhile along the way.

It matters that what we are dealing with here is at the level of culture, rather than with individuals' beliefs and decisions. We have no choice in this—evidence of innumerable individual decisions does not exist, and focusing on individuals would yield no evidence of fair coverage. At the strategic, cultural, level, besides truth, precision and clarity are our highest priorities. We are attempting to identify historical conditions that were most powerfully and successfully conducive to secularity or irreligion.

**Four general observations:** First, what we are also observing is the transition from medieval to modern times—from Christendom and a "Holy Roman Empire" to Europe, organized by nation-states; from reliance on religion as the principal ordering influence, to increasing reliance on science, philosophy, and public law enforcement, apart from religion; also the emergence of widespread skepticism and religious toleration, all promoted by increasingly powerful technology accelerating the speed of historical change.

Second, the history is nonetheless illuminated by the Augustinian concept of the two Cities—as a decisive shift from at least the purported love of God in all things, to the love of ourselves and mundane things in themselves, of more immediate and ephemeral appeal.

Third, this involves the transition from a sense of the world as a universe or coherent whole, ordered by a single omnipotent God or *Logos*, to seeing and dealing with the world in various parts as if they are separate—each ordered by its own laws, understood in its own terms that are not taken together because as it turned out they cannot be such; they are mutually incompatible, incommensurable, and incoherent—foreclosing the concept of a single *Logos,* and enforcing the Earthly City's focus on things in themselves, which is the essence of secularity

Fourth, the parts correspond to the modern academic disciplines which they produced, with which we are familiar from our own educational experience. This has been described as the transition from a "university", or *encyclopaedia* of learning *(encyclos=*universa*l, paedeia=*education or culture*)* to what is now commonly referred to as the modern "multiversity" of scholarship, science and education describing multiple worlds in terms of separately siloed academic disciplines. We shall be particularly attentive to the effects of this fragmentation on human life, thought, and values.

In sum: medieval to modern; Augustine's two cities; universe to multiverse; corresponding to modern academic disciplines and the fallacies thereof. Our world has been split in pieces (*Isaiah* 24:19).

**History:** It is generally agreed that early-modern times and secularization, however defined, arose with the Renaissance and Reformation in the 15th-16th centuries. Renaissance humanists' recovery of the documentary sources of ancient Classical philosophy revealed substantial alternatives to current Christian doctrines and practices, attracting serious interest. In particular, Christian humanism's recovery of documentary sources of early Christianity opened contemporary Christian theology and practice to fresh and rigorous reconsideration, leading to powerful criticisms and searches for authenticity. The rise of cities and civic humanism recovered Classical political thought, and opened

politics and government to secular reasoning. Humanists' focus on grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and moral philosophy—the "humanities"—outside of scholasticism's metaphysical and theological disciplines and pedagogy, created an energetic, liberally educated, lay population of citizens as the most progressive intellectuals in society.

Moreover, the late medieval Church—the only Church people had—was at a practical level fatally self-destructive. Its leadership, from the Renaissance papacy down through the hierarchy to "secular" clergy at the grassroots (with exceptions of course), was in various degrees conspicuously corrupt, venal and thoroughly entangled in personal and family (e.g., Visconti, Borgia, Sforza and Medici) politics and imperial wars. Dante condemned Pope Boniface VIII to the eighth circle of Hell for simony—selling Church offices. Lorenzo Valla's Christian humanist debunking (1440) of the "Donation of Constantine" as an 8th century forgery of a bogus 5th century decree, demolished the papacy's claim (*contra* Augustine) to sovereignty over both ecclesiastical and lay governments. Corrupt practices such as selling "indulgences" to raise funds for vainglorious Vatican building campaigns attracted widespread resentment and disrespect, epitomized by Martin Luther's rebellion which sparked the Reformations.

The inevitable response of Reformers on the one hand revived the original Augustinian spirit of Christianity at the ground level and in scattered areas, but on the other hand permanently destroyed at a practical level the pretensions of the Roman Church to ruling power over a unified "Christendom." It is significant that the criticisms raised against Roman Catholicism reflected Augustinian doctrines of the two cities. The ensuing "Wars of Religion" between Catholics and Protestants further discredited religion itself as the principal ordering agent of Christendom, and within the Holy Roman Empire prompted the emperor in the 1555 Diet of Augsburg to attempt restoring peace through limited religious toleration, the secularizing political principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*—that the religions of entire realms should be whatever was the religion of its ruling prince. This gave rise to widespread skepticism and alienation from religion itself. As the prominent French essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533-92) wrote, "Our religion was created to extirpate vices; instead, it conceals them, it nourishes them, and it incites them."

The Renaissance and Reformation were both empowered by the modernizing and secularizing technological revolution of mechanical printing with movable type, introduced in 1452 by Johannes Gutenberg in Strasbourg and rapidly disseminated throughout Europe. Its first strategic application was to strengthen religion, in Luther's disruptive reformation in Germany, distributing his German Bible, fortified by his flood of printed fliers ("*flugschriften*") promoting his *Bible*-based theology. The new technology overwhelmed the obsolete resistance in Latin manuscripts published by the Catholic Church. His model strategy was followed successfully in England by William Tyndale, as well as throughout what were emerging as independent polities of Europe. But the power of printing over manuscript publishing strengthened public communication in all fields, accelerating intellectual and scientific innovations.

The most powerful example of the disintegration and multiplication of independent fields was the Scientific Revolution, begun in 1543 and continuing into the 19th century with Darwin, creating the panoply of modern sciences. The transformation began in astronomy and human physiology. Nicholas Copernicus' *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* superseded Ptolemy's ancient *Almagest* by demonstrating the mathematical superiority and astronomical accuracy of positing the sun rather than Earth as the center of our universe and cosmological fulcrum for Christendom. Also in 1543, in biology Andreas Vesalius' *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* superseded Classical Galen's physiology by presenting realistic Renaissance perspectival drawings of the human anatomy. Both works were more accurate and useful than their Old Paradigm predecessors. They also set new epistemological standards for their respective sciences: thinking on the basis of evidence rather than simply following traditional conventional authorities who had been woven into the cultural traditions of Christendom. They precipitated a flood of scientific discoveries for the next several centuries*.*

Apart from the natural sciences, major "real-world" events and developments reinforced the disintegration of medieval Christendom and evoked secularizing disciplines which became modern social sciences.

The study of politics by itself began with population increases in trading centers of Renaissance Italy, creating towns, then cities, similar to the conditions in Classical Greece and Rome, thus increasing the

relevance of Classical political thought to the novel forms and practices of government. From this was born a new discipline of "political science", epitomized by Machiavelli's suggestions in his *Discourses on the Republic* of "*como mantenere lo stato*"—"how to maintain the state", and his satirical analysis of amoral tyranny in *The Prince,* both based on considerations of relative power, apart from traditional religious doctrines. The later thought of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau followed the secular empirical model.

The global voyages of discoveries (Columbus, Magellan, Vespucci, da Gama, Cabot) enabled by new seagoing technology opened wider worlds to conquest in Africa, the Americas, and Asia (the "Far East"), suddenly making available their immense and previously by Europeans untapped natural resources, leading to the birth of modern economics. Huge amounts of silver and gold flooded into Christendom from the Americas, forcing a transformation of the European economy—first by causing rampant inflation spreading out from Spain and Portugal across the Continent, then by empowering newly monied secular rulers and merchants.

These had disastrous effects on the poor, and socially disruptive effects on upper-class aristocratic remnants of land-based medieval feudalism. Traditional theological and moralistic terms failed to explain these phenomena, and because they were distinctly economic and social, they evoked separate and exclusively specialized disciplines of study. Copernicus in 1519 had written a paper on the problems of debasing coinage, setting up monetary phenomena as autonomous, but it was in the relatively compact realm of Elizabethan England that the social science of economics was born. Sir Thomas Smith (1513-1577) was the first to identify the Europe-wide inflationary crisis as caused by the flood of silver and gold from the "New" World, originating from their gateways in Spain and Portugal. Rulers attempted first to take advantage of their new powers of minting coinage, but when inflation diluted that they responded by reducing the portion of precious metals in coins. Thomas Gresham (1519-1579) formulated his strictly economic "Law"—that "bad" money drives out "good"—as a scientific observation and secular guardrail for public policy.

Among the new public problems generated by the rise of cities was persistent urban poverty, where the poor had no way to pay off their debts. In 1525 the city government of Bruges commissioned the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540) to devise a plan to address the problem. His resulting treatise, *On Assistance to The Poor or On Human Necessities* ("*De Subventione Pauperum sive de Humanis Necessitatibus"*) (1526), received widespread attention and has been called the first treatise in modern sociology because he was examining holistically the health of society.

Vives has also been called the "Father of Modern Psychology" for his exclusively focused analyses of mental and emotional processes in education. He was a pioneer in the education of women, following his appointment as tutor to Henry VIII's daughter Mary. Vives himself was highly exceptional, raised in a Spanish Jewish *converso* Christian (who knows?) family (the Inquisition burned his parents). He had produced in 1521 a critical edition of Augustine's *City of God,* commissioned by Erasmus, and became a philosophical pioneer in reviving Classical Stoicism, from which perspective he wrote numerous leading treatises on public issues, positing as basic values the cosmological as well as human historical concepts of concord and discord, as in his greatest work, *De Concordia et Discordia in Humano Genere* (1528). These terms were consonant with Augustine's two "Cities", though that parallel was not explicit in the work; what is significant here is that Vives was addressing issues in innovative ways.

The subsequent history of the Scientific Revolution over the next few centuries was far more complex than we can fairly describe here by citing particular advances; its key results for secularization were:

— Its empirical basis—thinking on the basis of evidence—delimiting particular scientific disciplines (e.g. astronomy, physiology, etc.) as constituting the "natural sciences" apart from traditional Christian metaphysical scholastic philosophy. As Sir Francis Bacon wrote in the early 1600s, inquiries should proceed by empirical experiments "so that philosophy and the sciences may no longer float in air, but rest on the solid foundation of experience of every kind."

— Especially after Galileo's persecution by the Roman Inquisition (1632), the emerging scientific disciplines found it safer to be autonomous, avoiding all references to religion and theological issues even though their practitioners were at least nominally Christians. Each discipline was *exclusively* specialized—i.e., focusing on its own subject, developing its own vocabulary, to the exclusion of other subjects, disciplines, and vocabularies, rather than being conceived and articulated as *inclusively* specialized with respect to each other, to be mutually coherent. The intransigent Church helped push secularization.

— This meant that science and scholarship at their highest levels could not be taken together as describing a whole world, or universe.

— In practice however, in the short run at least, there were powerfully attractive and evident advantages in pursuing them—they were designed to work and solve practical problems, they worked well, and were productive of concrete and demonstrable benefits.

— Gradually the principle became accepted that the sciences, based on evidence, were epistemologically more reliable than religions based on tradition, faith, revelation and/or reason alone, as stated by conventionally accepted and increasingly contested ancient authorities.

— To fill the vacuum left by the demise of religious dogma, the Scientific Revolution precipitated an energetic philosophical search for alternative rationalist (Descartes) or empiricist (Bacon) belief systems.

— As scientific progress gained momentum, "scientism" arose—the belief that modern science itself can replace religion as a fully equivalent understanding of the world, life and thought, and that it could be relied upon not to become as dangerous and corrupting as religion had proved to be.

— This was the beginning of the modern "two cultures" phenomenon, separating and isolating the cultures of the sciences from the humanities, of facts from values.

Beyond high culture and strategic developments there was chaos and Earthly City emergency restructuring in the wake of lost leadership in every realm. For a while, might did indeed make right in both politics and business. Rulers—kingships and powerful aristocracies—were sorted out by constant military battles and wars. Wealth gained power from financing mercenary armies and banking (e.g. Fuggers, Medici, and later Rothschilds, et al.).

**Evaluation:** But if the world is in fact a coherent whole, a universe, then dealing with it in separate parts as an incoherent multiverse ought not to work very well in the long run. So we have discovered that gradually and with the increasing force of "global" issues, the exclusions baked into the multiversity have fed back as immense and fundamental practical problems.

The separation of engineering from ecology, for example, has produced numerous environmental disorders, from global warming and climate change to biodiversity and extinction crises, pollution, overpopulation, and many other dysfunctions in nature. Runaway technology on its own is creating today an existential crisis for humanity itself, with generative artificial intelligence speeding out of control to produce robots powered by algorithms that think much faster and more powerfully than humans do. What we used to call education—enriching who we are by developing values—is rapidly devolving into training, defining what we are by imparting skills in small-niche, short run, "gig" economies.

There was, to be sure, resistance and articulate opposition to the new learning. In 1611 the English poet John Donne prophetically wrote the *Anatomy of the World,* in which "the frailty and decay of this whole world is represented."

"[The] new philosophy calls all in doubt,

The element of fire is quite put out,

The Sun is lost, and th'earth, and no man's wit

Can well direct him where to look for it.

And freely man confesses that this world's spent,

When in the Planets, and the Firmament

They seek so many new; then see that this

Is crumbled out again to his Atomies.

Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;

All just supply, and all Relation.

Prince, subject, Father, Son

Are things forgot."

But resistance to advancing secularization was hopeless, because the powers behind it were insuperably greater than the defense, and apparently successfully on the march. They had the initiative in reorganizing culture. They could work simultaneously even if they could not be synthesized. So they built the modern Western world as Earth's most powerful system historically, whose fallacies were slower to reveal themselves. We are at that point of revelation today.

**VIII. Christianity Now: This New Age and De-Secularization**

**Background:**

It will help to set the stage: We are living today in an extremely rare kind of period in history, in which all mature fields of human endeavor are being simultaneously transformed. Individual field transformations—paradigm-shifts—occur relatively frequently in modern history; but when they occur in all fields simultaneously, it is an ­Age of Paradigm-Shifts, when entire cultures are transformed. This has happened only three times previously in 2500 years of Western history; ours is the fourth.

To grasp the scale of what we are talking about, the first was the rise of Classical Civilization in Periclean Athens, ca. 500 BCE. The second was a thousand years later, with the fall of Rome and the rise of the Christianity and the Roman Church in the 4th-5th centuries, CE. The third was in another thousand years: the early-modern breakup of medieval civilization and the rise of modern secularism, from the Renaissance and Reformation through the Scientific Revolution and Age of Global Discoveries and the rise of nation-states to the 18th-century Enlightenment, producing "modern" times in the 19th and 20th centuries. It was powerfully promoted by the revolution in information technology: Gutenberg's printing with movable type. Ours today is driven by technological revolutions, especially in Information Technology (IT): computers, the internet, and now generative artificial intelligence (GAI).

Ours differs from its predecessors in several respects: much greater speed, happening in decades (since the 1990s) rather than centuries; with immediate global reach outside the West, owing to the internet; with unknown direction—we have no idea where it is headed post-modernity; because the technology driving it is for the first time running out ahead of human control—growing faster, farther, and autonomously—self-propelled and self-directed. Instead of a "Reformation" or "Rebirth", consciously purporting to recover known ancient models, this is a totally innovative "Transformation."

**Christianity in this Age of Transformation:**

Needless to say, this is a highly challenging time in which to live. For Christians it is especially challenging because modernity has already undermined religion by aggressive and pervasive secularization. We must acknowledge that today formerly mainstream Christianity is now moribund. Church membership and attendance are dangerously low and declining fast—in the U.S. from over 60% of adults in the mid-twentieth century to less than 15% today. Demise is predicted soon as elders pass away and youth continue to be alienated. Ecclesiastical leadership presiding over this demise shows no emphatic sign of alarm or embarrassment, much less energetic counter-offensive strategies, as if they are generally stuck in cruise control. Growth spasms of reactionary evangelicals and fundamentalists in the U.S. and around the world have no chance of shoveling back the tide—that has been tried before without success, and they do not address the subversive forces that have produced the current crisis. Whether or not we like it, Christianity is being transformed, possibly out of existence altogether.

If there is any hope for the future, it must come not from fine-tuning details, but from fundamental transformation, radical in the sense of digging down to the roots (*radices)*. That is the challenge this final chapter addresses—uprooting the still-living enfeebled plant from its diseases, then pruning both branches and roots, and transplanting it optimistically into the present and foreseeable-future environment of the Christian religion. We shall need to rely on the wisdom of Richard Hooker's critical distinction between those elements of our historical and inherited religion that are unchanging and necessary to salvation, and those that are variable, "indifferent" and therefore expendable.

I readily acknowledge that this is an extremely ambitious analysis; but as a trained and experienced historian, observing an historical crisis, I have concluded that we are now in a "sink or swim" time in the history of our religion. Anyone with better suggestions is urged to share them. This final chapter is constructively intended, to show that Christianity, despite its persistent flaws and current trauma, can play a helpful role in navigating the churning and profoundly disruptive waters of this Age of Transformation, providing a way to gain deeper fulfillment in life. We shall focus on reconfiguring and promoting our Christian religion for positive problem-solving in these troubled times.

The fundamental assumption of our subject and this chapter is that the essential purpose of the Christian religion is personal salvation—living in accordance with the *Logos*, *coram Deo,* in the spirit of Christ. In this context, churches—institutions of religion and their apparatus—are instrumental, means to that end, not ends in themselves. As we have seen in previous chapters, they change and are reformed from time to time. We do not see them at all in John's *Gospel*; St. Augustine both advocated and warned against them; the various Reformations confirmed their problematic character. So they are in Hooker's terms at least in part evidently "indifferent" rather than "necessary" to salvation. Our highest concern is the fortification of the Christian religion as distinct from its churches, and we are especially interested in outreach to those who have not known or have known and been alienated by Christian churches whose membership is now collapsing. We shall proceed by identifying a few prominent features that seem to call out for problem-solving attention.

**Reviving Christianity:**

**a. Science:**

An obvious and exemplary place to start is with our need to conspicuously realign Christianity with modern science. Ignoring science—what is demonstrably known today about the natural, material world—as a practical matter dooms us to failure, because science and scientific technology increasingly dominate modern culture and are now driving its transformation to postmodernity. Neglecting, evading, or opposing science does not attract, and is guaranteed to further repel, most and especially younger people from "following the *Logos",* which is after all the ground of science as well as of our religion.

This is not a novel or "woke" idea. As we pointed out in Chapter I, the alignment of Christianity with current science was first posited in our cornerstone *Gospel of John,* to reach out from Judaism to the Gentiles in their philosophical and scientific culture*.* Christianity and science parted ways during the Wars of Religion in the secularizing early modern Scientific Revolution. Now we are obliged once again to reach out to contemporary scientific culture from our shared universal base.

That is, today's re-alignment is facilitated by the fundamental fact that, as in John's view, Christianity and science are both predicated on the same fundamental assumption: that the world is a coherent whole, a universe, ordered by a single system of laws, the *Logos*, which (who) "is God"—in the words of St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 CE), "that than which no greater can be conceived." There has been some disagreement among scientists on this, exemplified by Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in physics, but that hypothesis is necessarily predicated on current technology rather than absolute knowledge. Einstein did not accept it, succinctly and famously saying that "God does not play dice." As Christians we are committed to cosmological coherence because our monotheism is based on it; in scientific practice coherence in theories is universally respected as a criterion of truth.

So: cosmologists today, enabled by scientific technology, have discovered that the universe contains not just our own galaxy, long thought to have been made for us and with us on Earth at its center, but an estimated 200 billion galaxies, each with 100 billion stars like our sun, and with no physical "center." Our own universe is 13.7 billion years (the length of Earth's years) old. Earth, the [only planet](https://exoplanets.nasa.gov/news/1658/among-trillions-of-planets-are-we-home-alone/) we know that supports life (though we now suspect there must be others), began about 4.6 billion years ago. Evolution happened extremely slowly—it took 900 million years for microbial life to appear, and 4.5 billion more years for mammals, 65 million years more for humanoids, and around 300,000 years more for the first *Homo sapiens*. The first cave paintings were made about 65,000 years ago. The appearance of human culture dramatically accelerated the rate of human-historical change, but the emergence of distinctively Judaic culture took another roughly 60,000 years, and another 4,000 years until the birth of Christ.

So much for Biblical Judeo-Christian cosmology and philosophy of history, though there may be an interesting pattern here of divine style: to create humanity on a single minor planet in a minor galaxy is noticeably like becoming incarnate in an obscure provincial Jewish "suffering servant" who preached a religion of loving and self-sacrificial service to others while purporting to make disciples of the whole world. Since assertions that are false cannot be necessary to salvation, we need to develop a new Christian

cosmology, explicitly consigning the ancient tradition to literature, not science—interesting as cultural history, but of metaphorical, not empirical, value.

A realignment with modern science has far too many deep and complex dimensions to be explored here, but let us accept at least that the world has no center, that Earth is a minor planet, of a minor sun, in a minor galaxy, and that we have no idea of what is our relation to it all, save that we are the sole exception we know so far, of relatively highly developed life. (Astronomers are currently debating whether another planet, designated [K2-18b](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/K2-18b), 124 light years distant from Earth, is hycean—the word was coined in 2021)—having a hydrogen-rich atmosphere overlaying deep ocean liquid water, which are preconditions conducive to life.)

In that context we have come to dominate our planet's ecosystems, for better and possibly worse. We are by default stewards of our environment, though our sole dominance may turn out to have been temporary and fatal. We still believe nonetheless that the entire world is a universe, ordered completely by a single coherent system, the *Logos*. The *Logos* is omnipotent, not meaning that it can do anything, but in the sense that it does everything. All power—natural and human (which is also natural)—derives from it, so we, following Saints John and Paul, regard it as the Supreme Being, or God.

This is not pantheism because what is being worshipped is not nature itself but the ultimate creating and ordering power undergirding Nature. We believe that our highest—most viable and fruitful—mode of existence—i.e., salvation— is to live harmoniously with the *Logos*, as Saints do. Nature necessarily follows the *Logos* so it is surely sanctified, though not divine. For us there are two "commandments": to subordinate all our concerns to serving the *Logos,* and accordingly Nature, and to treat all other humans as equals, as we would ourselves be treated.

Incidentally, this also forecloses by definition, the common and vulgar question of whether or not God exists, whether or not there is a "higher" or "supernatural" power or being. The *Logos* doctrine is predicated on its "real" existence—that is why we worship it, and work to align our lives in harmony with it and with Nature.

In that context, within the scientific worldview, John's argument that Christ was the *Logos* incarnate added to the scientific concept a personal dimension as a metaphysical attribute, the complexities of which we cannot adequately address here. A fruitful line of inquiry might well begin with Augustine's concept of the two cities, formed by two loves—of God, "even to the contempt of self", or of self—all mundane or worldly things—"even to the contempt of God."

**b. Churches:**

It is probably generally agreed that the purpose of religion is personal salvation—living deeply fulfilling, stable and coherent lives, in harmony with the *Logos.* The purpose of religious institutions therefore—churches, doctrines, traditions—is also salvation, to which they should be conducive by being themselves in harmony with Natural Law. Their two main functions, as Hooker said, are worship and education.

But it is a matter of fact that Jesus and the earliest Christians were not institutionally inclined—Christianity and salvation were originally entirely personal. Our original religion became thoroughly institutionalized because its early leadership was taken over, *faute de mieux*, by monks, who were attempting to achieve salvation through institutionalization—by strictly following rules governing every aspect of their lives. The world around them was in chaos—politically, economically, socially and culturally—so they sought to withdraw from it, to try to achieve their own personal salvation in sheltered spaces, requiring institutionalization.

But thorough institutionalization carried with it dangers of excessive success, when institutions become followed for their sake rather than, in this case, for the love of God. As we have seen St. Augustine, the foremost authority in Christian ideas about human life and history, conceived of human life as belonging to two "Cities", loving God or Man, Heaven or Earth. They were entirely personal. He considered neither "City" to be amenable to institutionalization or any concrete embodiment; both were internal and

spiritual—personal and societal—manifested in the values inherent in our individual and collective decisions throughout our lives. When humans, who are weak, follow institutions which are stronger, rather than the love of God, they are nonetheless in the Earthly City.

He was proven right, as we have seen in subsequent chapters. As times changed and cultures evolved, so too did the human configurations of the two Cities. Their particular manifestations were historically

conditioned, qualified by circumstances in various times and places. In periodic reformations, certain leading Christians found it necessary to prune away corrupting institutional accretions. The churches were thereby proven to be "indifferent" and expendable. What was considered good and acceptable in some eras was not so in others. What we have learned from numerous surveys today is that inherited institutions of religion—churches—are now turning people away from religion. Church membership and attendance are disappearing in Europe, in America down 20% and falling since 2000. Charitable giving to religion has declined, 63% of the total to 24% from 1983 to 2023.

So particular features of Churches are not necessary to salvation but are in Hooker's word "indifferent"—possibly conducive to salvation, and possibly inimical and impedimental. Christian salvation does not depend on official membership in, confirmation by, or regular attendance in, any church. Despite their decline, personal spirituality and religion apparently continue unabated—a steady 81% of Americans say that they "believe in God", whatever that may actually mean.

At the same time, recent polls people report that they are suffering from "spiritual hunger"—wanting and needing spiritual depth and enrichment in their lives, but apparently not finding it in churches. A recent study by the Harvard Graduate School of Education found that 60%—three in five—young adults feel that their lives lack meaning and purpose. Doctrineless alternatives—e.g., yoga and mental "wellness"—are found helpful but not sufficient. In terms of the two Cities, people find the Heavenly City (not institutionalized) more desirable than the Earthly City—calling to them from mundane attractions (e.g., power, prosperity) in themselves, apart from God.

Ecclesiastical transformation is, therefore, necessary. It must focus on being conducive to salvation; and purification—ruthless pruning away of "indifferent" and impedimental factors. "Puritanism" was tried during the Reformations in early-modern Europe, but failed owing to uncritical and excessive institutionalization; this time institutional simplification needs to be done more carefully and critically.

**c. Christian Education:**

One of the core missions of Christianity, especially through its churches which Hooker called "Christ's school", has been Christian education. In these days of technological transformation, we need to be clear about the distinction between education and training. Education concerns the cultivation of personal character and values; it is a continuous lifelong process of self-development, defining who each of us is as we make our lives with decisions and value judgements along the way. It is intensely humanistic. Training concerns skills development, and is episodic, occurring from time to time, and developing what each of us is and can do, practically and often professionally. It can easily be well done with technology. The two inevitably and properly overlap—training imparting values as well, education including skills development.

Secularization has undermined self-development by fragmenting both life and thought, in which exclusions of holistic connecting and integrating factors produces broken lives. Caste-ism—racism, sexism, ageism and xenophobia—and our corrosively extreme political polarization and civil violence, are examples of fragmented, compartmentalized, thinking and feelings. We are divided against ourselves and each other, individually and collectively, struggling as citizens of Augustine's Earthly City.

Re-assembling the fragmented parts into a new wholeness and coherence of life and thought will probably be encouraged by the complementary re-integrations required to solve global ecological stresses. Holism will be a lifesaving strategy for both our environment and ourselves, and this plays to Christianity's strength. Christianity has a beneficial opportunity to become increasingly significant and influential—reinforced—culturally, if we can connect our brand and values to the mainstream ecological currents.

Making those connections is not difficult. From a Christian perspective, we have seen that Nature, necessarily following the *Logos*, is sanctified. The current ecological crisis was caused by, and consists in,

human attempts to deal with parts of Nature as if it were divided into separate parts, each to be simplistically dealt with by itself apart from others without ill effects—e.g. pumping gases into the

atmosphere or wastes into waterways as if they would not affect climate or ecosystems. But the exclusions fed-back as problems. Each environmental crisis demonstrates the truth summarized by Sir Francis Bacon in the 17th century, that "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed*."* Rescuing Nature from ecological catastrophes entails re-subordinating it to the *Logos,* which is to say God. Rescuing humans from broken lives entails re-subordinating those lives to God, the *Logos*."

Christian education therefore includes and learns from environmental education and training; they should be mutually reinforcing. The fact that we have come to dominate Earth's ecosystems, for better or worse, requires us to be careful of the whole of our natural world, with which we are holistically connected, on which we depend, and of which we are only a part. It is in our "enlightened self-interest" to be responsible ecological stewards of the rest of nature including ourselves, which technology has given us the power to manage or destroy.

**d. Post-Modern Sensibilities:**

In the spiritual and revealed doctrinal side of Christianity's and its churches' mission there are impediments we can no longer afford to ignore. Early Christianity , being formulated mainly by monks who lived by rules, properly felt it to be their responsibility to hold things together by sorting out theological doctrines, to identify orthodoxy and condemn heterodoxies. One of their principal conclusions, after centuries of disputes, was the Nicene Creed, established by the first Church-wide Council of bishops, convened by the emperor Constantine in Nicaea in 325 CE to summarize the unified belief of the Christian Church at that time. A shorter version known as the "Apostles' Creed" is still recited today by congregations in church liturgies as the core of our beliefs. However it contains a number of assertions that many today, both believers and seekers, have found problematic and impedimental. Here it is, with those elements underlined:

**Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,

he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.

The parts most readily accepted today are historical and have been confirmed by evidence; the parts most problematic for many modern Christians as well as seekers are more theological but not empirically demonstrable, based more on revelation and institutional tradition than evidence. As we have seen, Hooker proposed three criteria for validating doctrines in religion: Scripture, tradition, and "reason" by which he meant common sense. He further proposed as a criterion for evaluating those features, whether they are necessary, or "indifferent", for salvation.

He said, and we would agree, that we cannot know what is ultimate truth, nor whether, how, nor why a person is saved or not. Therefore, feeling the pressures and dangers of the sixteenth-century Wars of Religion, he counseled (and was one of the early advocates for) religious toleration—not eliminating these beliefs, but rather leaving them up to individuals and their consciences, being concerned officially only about faithful daily practice and participation in the Sacraments, as binding together the "Commonwealth". Practically speaking, in daily Christian life today, applying Hooker's test would result in calling these revelations "indifferent"because as ideas we find them to have been historically conditioned, so that as our times and beliefs have changed, and as Protestants we cannot know and may legitimately doubt their value to salvation.

Such modesty seems especially appropriate today in a time of transformative change, which disqualifies tradition as a criterion of truth. Rather than insisting dogmatically and on the Church's behalf, on conformity in all theological beliefs, and requiring all parishioners to recite them as their creeds, we would do better strategically to be more tactful and hospitable to folks wherever they are intellectually and spiritually. We might even construct a supplementary outreach version that edits-out the underlined impedimental parts of the Creed and reworks the edited text as follows:

**Revived Creed**

I believe in Almighty God,
creator and sustainer of heaven and earth,

and in Jesus Christ, his incarnate Son, our Lord,
Who taught by His example to love God and our neighbors.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the community of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,

and the possibility of salvation.

Amen.

To repeat: both creeds may still be used alternatively, as circumstances warrant. Our emphasis in emergency renewal today is for more fruitful outreach, and as it was in the 16th century on practical religion as personally experienced, avoiding entanglement in disputatious and inconclusive theoretical doctrines.

**e. Prayer:**

The practice of prayer is another point of challenge to modern sensibilities. In the context of what we know from science and the *Logos* doctrine, renewed Christianity needs to be clear about its moving beyond traditional and old-fashioned understandings. First, prayer is not about asking for divine favorable intervention in providing earthly things—e.g., a new bicycle, or worldly successes in business, sports, or politics and the like. As a practical matter prayer is more about ourselves and the state of our souls. When we pray we focus ourselves entirely on contemplation of the divine, seeking what might be God's grace and favor in our spiritual lives—"not my will but Thine be done." That is why the discipline of constant prayer is practically and spiritually helpful and beneficial in our pursuit of loving God, the *Logos*.

**f. Love is the Way:**

Ideas of love are apparently universal throughout human experience, having quite varied and complex histories in most if not all cultural and religious traditions. Its variety—including many types (e.g., familial, romantic, friendly, divine, etc.) within single traditions is universally accepted.

Christianity explicitly regards love's place and role in human life as central. In the *New Testament* John wrote that "God is love" (and the reverse) in the sense similar to God being truth or knowledge—particular expressions of the *Logos* animating all creation. We read in John's *Gospel* that *"God is Love",* an intrinsic attribute of the *Cosmos*, and in 3:16 that "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not die but have everlasting life." The entire 13th chapter of

Paul's *Letter to the Romans* is devoted to defining Christian love. Dante famously wrote this idea into the climactic closing words of the *Paradiso* in his masterpiece the *Divina Commedia* (*Divine Comedy),* referring to "the love that moves the sun and stars." In our own time Papal statements, and Episcopalian Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's book *The Way of Love* (2020) are offered as formal assertions of Christian thought. So although Christianity is not unique in its commitment to love, the strength and centrality of that commitment is characteristic of the Christian tradition.

Christians consider that if life is considered unique to the planet Earth, and humanity is considered the most highly evolved expression of life, the key to the most fulfilling richness and depth of human life is to be found in the practice of "loving" (*philos)*—the *Logos,* all creation, and especially all other human beings. This means that the pursuit of a Christian life turns on the conscious development of a life of love—i.e., *philos*, cultivation, nourishment, caring for, God (the *Logos)* and other humans. The realization of that love, wherever and whenever it occurs, is what gives the Christian life its exceptional depth and richness, its satisfying fulfillment, and makes it above all else worth pursuing.

Amen.

1. *Uenite / filii au/dite me / timore[m] / d[omi]ni do/cebo uos.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Pictura et scriptura huius pagine subtus visa est de propria manu S[an]c[t]i dunstani*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Dunstanum memet cle//mens rogo xpectuere. Tenarias me non sinas / sorbsisse procellas.* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)