

*PART IV*  
*Modern Religious Thought*  
*(Chapters 16 - 20)*



## Renaissance

The movement of secular humanism, to a place beyond just a fascination with things human, can be corresponded to the period known as the Renaissance. Religiously, there is really nothing new going on, except with the coming to head of the structure which has developed; perhaps if we wanted to call a period 'Dark', then oddly enough perhaps this one might be the best choice. But even that is hard because of the lack of agreement as to when the Renaissance actually begins. If placed earlier it takes in events which some would argue as 'un-enlightened'; if later then it places several momentous events in that same time considered 'un-enlightened'. Either way you lose, as the saying goes.

## Urban (the VI<sup>th</sup>) Renewal

For our purposes, we will look at this more in terms of attitude and development, because for us, time is not neatly divided up into historical segments. All religious, political, and social thinking has its roots someplace, and rarely do major events take place over-night – especially in the Church. What we might concentrate on is the period in which humanism becomes popularized, a general understanding within society as a whole, argued not just at an academic level but at the level of literature, architecture, art, and social activity, that is, as it begins to reach the general psyche.

If we take that route then we can point to Francesco Petrarch, whom we mentioned last class, and the rise of the Medici in Florence. Of course this places it square in the middle of a fractured Italy, before the return of the Papacy to Rome. Okay, this also seems to place most of the onus on art, which in a way makes sense. Rome is a ruin, and the renewed papacy under Pope Nicholas V (1397-1455) undertakes the great task of rebuilding it, physically and intellectually (he created the Vatican Library; Julius II created the Vatican Museum about 50 years later), both as a response to the need for urban renewal and a restatement of the restored authority of the papacy. The liberal arts are the major vehicle for both the Papacy and the Medici. The renewed interest in the Classical world, spurred on by both the spirit embodied in Petrarch and the papal renewal of Rome, brings many classical ideas into the forefront, incarnate in the new humanism.



**Figure 1: Pope Nicholas V**

Brunelleschi, Bernini, Michelangelo, Leonardo – these names are part and parcel of the art we recognize. What we forget about that their nostalgic view of Classicism is that it produced the architecture which defined Rome, at least a restored vision of the empire, and the great religious art which defined the Renaissance. It is the intellectual renewal brought on by Scholastic skepticism and empiricism which spurs exploration and the rethinking of many things which were previously 'understood'. What starts out as intellectual exercises and curiosity for the likes of Anselm becomes the tools for later, sometimes nefarious undertakings. For example, in 1440, Lorenzo Valla used humanist philological Latin skills and the new art of textual criticism to legitimately prove the document known as *The Donation of Constantine* as a later forgery<sup>1</sup>. Though not accepted by all at the time, the document was loosely used as a basis for apostolic (and therefore papal) temporal power stemming from the fact that in it Constantine I 'donated' the whole of the Western Roman Empire to the Catholic Church as an act of gratitude for having been miraculously cured of leprosy by Pope Sylvester I. But far from being

<sup>1</sup> Purported to be from the early 300's, it appears to be from as late as the 800's; the earliest existent Western copy is from around the ninth century, and though several exist in the East they may be from even later.

merely intellectual, the undertaking was spurred by political and economic forces and conflicting claims to the lands north of Rome.

## Have You Read The Latest?

As you might have caught, many of these events take place in time around one other somewhat major event – Gutenberg’s invention of the movable type printing press in 1450 which now allows for the relatively quick and inexpensive mass production of literature. What we are looking at is a period from about 1400 (the death of Petrarch and rise of the Medici) to about 1520 (the cusp of the Protestant schism) which does show a bit of compression, considering the time frames we have covered so far. Anyway, printing is square in the middle of it.

At this time ‘translation of the Bible’ meant for the most part, translations of Jerome’s 4<sup>th</sup> century Latin Vulgate into vernaculars, among the first being in Spanish by Boniface Ferrer in 1405. The Renaissance sees the Vulgate’s first printing (the very first book produced by Gutenberg is the beautiful ‘42-line’ Vulgate known as the *Mazarin Bible*) as well as translations of it in most *European* languages (under approval from the Church, of course). In the West there are very few existent older Greek texts (still in Greek in the East), but the renewed humanistic sense of linguistics and linguistic disciplines means that these available texts are becoming the basis for renewed Scriptural scholarship. Hebrew and Greek texts of the Hebrew Scriptures are being printed as well, giving even more sources.

## Isn’t That Yesterday’s News?

But the effect is initially slow in blossoming. Theology at this time is marked early on by many different groups vying for prominence. Differing schools becomes part of the struggle of temporal power, with the effect of muddling the waters and adding to the confusion of theology with Faith and Revelation. The idea of the ‘spirit of renewal’ that nowadays so often characterizes the Renaissance captured the dynamic nature of Catholicism, and therein called for an adaptation of traditional teachings, in light of humanistic thinking and a new appreciation of the historical context in the study of the Scriptures and the Church Fathers. Additionally one of the growing movements is in some ways an ‘anti-intellectual’ movement, away from the heady Aristotelian intellectualism of Scholasticism (which is basically incomprehensible to most common folk), and per those common folks inspired by the likes Francis, Clare, and Dominic, toward an in-the-trenches application of the Gospel to the personal needs of the faithful.

In its defense, Scholasticism had sought to bridge the gap between Faith and reason by bringing reason to bear on theological matters. The art of theology soars, but in light of the death, pain, and suffering, it seemed to the burgeoning Renaissance mind as out of touch with contemporary realities. The sometimes esoteric over-intellectualism of Scholasticism, while energizing universities, was perceived as the failure of the Faith to move individuals to a more genuine living out of their Christian commitment. Augustine’s and Anselm’s *Faith and reason* was becoming a struggle of *belief (faith) and reason*. This is a subtle fact. There is a limited movement back to the idealism of Plato and Augustine, but caught up in the new humanism, causing the empiricism of Scholasticism to be seen as idealistic and out of touch, and its transfer to the new sciences seems a better direction. Scholasticism’s orientation toward abstract concepts puts it outside of what is now perceived to be the function and purpose of Christianity and draws the criticism of Petrarch (1304–1374) and Erasmus (1466–1536), who proposed replacing it with ‘New Learning’ based solely in humanism, thereby wresting theology from strictly being what they supposed as merely an intellectual exercise.

This new approach and its scripture scholarship beg the question: is there new revelation? That is to say, is there an understanding of Revelation which is outside of the traditional one taught and controlled by the Church hierarchy?

## What'chu Talking 'Bout Willis?

So, the esoteric nature of Scholastic Theology and the growing sense of the centrality of humanity begins a disconnect in the understanding of the place and nature of theology in everyday life and in terms of the Faith. Unregulated (and thereby often non-standard) liturgical practices and growing worldliness of the clergy (also due to non-standard training) give no consistent place for the telling of the stories which are at the heart of the Faith. The indifference to the sacramental acts and nature of the priesthood move it farther and farther away from the everyday faithful.

Many different routes and communities grow up around this problem. One of the most important (for us) is the increasing tendency to emphasize *preaching* over *theology*. What I mean by that is the movement from the *homily* (literally 'breaking open' Scripture for understanding, it is a short scripture-based reflection to relate the challenges of living everyday in the world to the proclaimed Scripture message) to the *sermon* (a lecture or discourse given for the purpose of providing religious instruction or inspiring one to appropriate moral behavior). Preaching and teaching are not the same but are related, in that both are an important part of the Faith.

Liturgically, the faithful are becoming distance from the purpose and goal of ritual and sacred practices. Devotions become the norm of the day, and street-corner preachers (and preaching orders like the Dominicans) are drawing crowds with their sermons. Theology and practice are drifting further and further apart. Which brings us to a growing trend: the problem of faith versus Faith. The ultimate problem is that when Faith becomes reduced to belief (faith) then the 'truth' (Faith) becomes *only that which I can believe*.

## Desiderius Erasmus

If we want to examine the height and the depths of the Western Church at this period, we can probably find no greater example than within the heart and mind of this man, Erasmus (1466-1536). A priest, he was indifferent to the ministry of the priesthood. A man of great religious depth and protected by popes, he was probably the most brilliant of the humanists. To perhaps the chagrin of both sides who wish to claim him, he was a bit of a boat-rocker.

Illegitimate (not unheard of in any period, but quite common here), his father, according to his family's plan, eventually became a priest and his mother raised he and his elder brother. By thirteen both his parents were dead in a plague, and he was sent to a monastery school, a period he called his 'lost years'. Even so his quick wit, amazing powers of comprehension, probably photographic memory, command of languages, and a voracious desire to learn were jump-started and given wide latitude in these monastic schools. Eventually, he was chosen as a secretary for a



Figure 2: Erasmus

bishop, who insisted upon his ordination.

So we take a moment here and examine that fact. Erasmus' father was, according to Erasmus, basically forced into service of the Church by his family.<sup>2</sup> As for Erasmus, the second son, not poor but not noble and not really part of the middle class, his prospects were slim; like his father before him, his guardians aimed him for an ecclesial life. His propensity for quick learning served him well but less as a priest and more as a teacher, scribe or secretary but in order to fulfill that function he was required to be ordained. The priesthood was not so much a *vocation* (a 'calling') for him but an *avocation*, a job. With the line between politics and religion so vastly blurred, what might have

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<sup>2</sup> In their defense, it was a noble desire that at least one of the nine brothers should serve God; in his defense they told him she had died.

been a rewarding career in politics and education was wrapped in the mystic role of the priest. This also points to the growing problem of authority, especially for priests like Erasmus. Canonically and traditionally, priests derive their authority to preach, teach, and perform sacramental duties from their bishop. They serve, as they say, at the bishop's pleasure. The traditional structure means that any authority a priest has comes from his bishop, not within himself, and it is given and taken away in terms of the priest's subservience to the bishop or abbot. At this time (as was also happening to nobles and other political endowments) with many sees being conferred 'honorarily' there are many 'absentee' bishops. The fight is often between an honest and sincere bishop and the clergy of the diocese he takes over and vice versa. Powerful kings, nobles, families can thwart the efforts of even the holiest of clerics. In a sense, the roles have become separate – bishops often no longer care about or control their sees, and priests are disconnected from the hierarchical authority as it becomes weaker and weaker.



**Figure 4:**  
**Thomas More**

Okay, back to Erasmus. After he lost his job with the bishop, he traveled about France but renounced Paris because he so utterly rejected the Scholasticism championed there and any studies he engaged in went poorly. Still, this period proved to be most advantageous for him. After tutoring several Englishmen, he was introduced into the English Oxford circle which included reform-minded people the likes of Thomas More (1478-1535, future Prime



**Figure 3: John Colet**

Minister of Henry VIII – strongly attached to the Church) and John Colet (son of the Mayor of London – not as strongly attached), who showed him how to reconcile the Faith with humanism by abandoning the scholastic method and devoting himself to a thorough study of Scripture. For this reason he undertook the study of Greek, in order to more fully understand them. In this he also was inspired to undertake one of those first new translations of the Scriptures using the original Greek and not the Vulgate.

While not particularly effective as a cleric, his faith was strong and per his experience in the monastery and the clergy, his desire for reform great. He felt that he ordered his life around three things: love for and pursuit of truth, disdain for money and power (worldly things), and an extreme distaste for polemics (the art of proving one's point as superior to another's). For Erasmus, learning led to virtue, scholarship to God; theology would only be restored by wresting it from the cold dead hands of the Scholastics. This was to be the means toward the revival of a living and lived Christianity and the Church as a whole. But all of this had to be done within the boundaries of the Church. While he defended Luther's thinking, he admonished him for his actions, and then eventually opposed him. He kept a weathered eye on Christian morality and ethics, but desired less hierarchy which he saw in terms of the abusive practices. In the end his was part and parcel of the general growing vision of piety over orthodoxy.

## Julius II

Pope Julius II (1443- 1513) represents another side of the Renaissance. Elected in 1503, he filled some interesting shoes. A soldier by heart, he had a vision of a united Italy (read Papal States) free from the foreign agents and control, especially by the French (do not forget that the Avignon Papacy only ended 50 years earlier). On the other hand he actually also has a pious side, and enacted some basic reforms dealing with *simony* ("a deliberate intention of buying or selling for a temporal price such things as are spiritual or annexed unto spirituals" – basically any exchange of spiritual for temporal things is *simony*), set up several diocese in the newly discovered



**Figure 5: Julius II**

America, and finally convened the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517) to eradicate specific abuses within the Church and especially within the Roman Curia (the bureaucracy of the Western Church) and schismatic cardinals seeking to extract themselves from papal control.

He accomplished this because he was free from the nepotism which had so plagued the hierarchy for so long. But along with that piety he also carried the humanist spirit which was rebuilding Rome. Per that he created the Vatican Museum as noted previously (saving the various pieces of stuff which were being churned up in the re-build), hired Michelangelo, Raphael, and Bramante, and laid the cornerstone of the gigantic restoration of the Basilica of St. Peter. His last accomplishment is Michelangelo's Moses which adorns his tomb, that and pissing off a large number of nobles.

## Putting It All Together

With the increase in humanism, even the position of God will be questioned. The teachings of the Eastern and Western Church begin to fall to the questions of the new thinking. The new understanding of science will enhance the life of humanity, albeit imperfectly, but one questions whether it enhances the soul.

There are the two sides to the Renaissance: the advent of what is thought of as the modern 'spirit' in opposition to the 'spirit' which prevailed during the Middle Ages, and the revival of classic (especially of Greek) learning and the recovery of ancient art causing the rejuvenation of classical sculpture, painting, and architecture style. But, increasingly, humanism was being equated with the Renaissance, and the Renaissance with not just reform but Re-formation, an abandonment of the Church for the re-making of the Church in individual images.

John Colet wanted reform and like Thomas More and Erasmus, wanted that reform to take place within the Church. His admonitions to the clergy point to the problems which had developed and which continued to weaken the authority of the Magisterium: 'devilish pride', 'carnal concupiscence', 'worldly covetousness', and 'worldly occupations'. Still, there is not a loss of holiness among many faithful, despite the poor example of many of the clergy.

In 1493 Pope Alexander VI issued the papal bull<sup>3</sup> *Inter Caetera*, which in light of the finding of people by Columbus, encourages the Catholic kings to "enter upon so great an undertaking with greater readiness and heartiness endowed with benefit of our apostolic favor" "to bring under your sway the said mainlands and islands with their residents and inhabitants and to bring them to the Catholic faith." While the partial resolutions of some of the problems of the Church are on the horizon, this brings up a whole new chapter in the struggle of the spiritual versus the temporal.

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*"Erasmus laid an egg and Luther hatched it."*

**Common Admonishment, ~1520**

*"I thought good to divert myself with drawing up a panegyric upon Folly. How! what maggot, says you, put this in your head? Why, the first hint, Sir, was your own surname of More, which in Greek, comes as near the literal sound of the word as you yourself are distant from the signification of it, and that in all men's judgments is vastly wide. In the next place, I supposed that this kind of sporting wit would be by you more especially accepted of. By you, Sir, that are wont with this sort of jocose raillery, such as, if I mistake not, is neither dull nor impertinent, to be mightily pleased, and in your ordinary converse to approve yourself a Democritus junior. For truly, as you do from a singular vein of wit very much dissent from the common herd of mankind, So, by an incredible affability and pliability of temper, you have the art of suiting your humour with all sorts of companies. I hope therefore you will not only*

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<sup>3</sup> From the Latin *bull*a, or bubble, it came to be applied to the leaden seals with which authenticated papal and royal documents in the early Middle Ages, and was eventually attached to the documents itself. So basically a bull is an official document, statement, letter, or what-not.

*readily accept of this rude essay as a token from your friend; but take it under your more immediate protection, as being dedicated to you, and by that title adopted for yours, rather than to be fathered as my own."*

**Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly* (introductory note to St. Thomas More)**

## Modern

This is a word we must be careful with. In historical and philosophical terms it points to the period of time after the Renaissance and leading up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century ‘Enlightenment’. ‘Modern’ is one of those terms which is outdated the moment you apply it and for that reason I quote it. Anyway, we still consider ourselves in the post-modern period (see the problem?), that is, an era which is the direct result of the ‘modern’ period. Ultimately what we are talking about here is ‘Modern’ thought, which is distinguished from Classical and Scholastic thought and hence is based in the beginning of a total revolution in thinking.

## Modern Thought

In the West, Modern thought begins with folks like Rene Descartes (1596-1650) and John Locke (1632-1704). It is thinking which starts in Scholastic skepticism (the questioning of all knowledge in order to logically and empirically define what is knowable) and like the subtle change in the meaning of humanism comes to mean thinking which relies completely on human observation, understanding, and rationality, coupled with the growing sense of individuality, where individualism becomes valued over community and Church. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is a slight offset to this, proposing that outside the iron-fisted community the individual is quite scurrilous, and prone to descend into chaos and darkness, but more on that to come.

Even with its basis in (and because of) the theological and scientific movements created by Scholasticism and the re-discovery of Aristotle, Western thought is shifting away from metaphysical explanations. The increase in population based in better farming methods, among other things, and ultimately cheap printing which can get books into more hands, means that more and more people are being educated. The expansion of literacy<sup>4</sup> and the spread of the liberal arts mean that humanism is on the rise, and that the understanding of humanism has finally moved beyond just a scholastic interest in things human. The increase in reliance on reason rather than revelation is sparking what we think of as the ‘scientific’ revolution. The difference being that medieval skepticism and the loss of medieval piety is changing the notion of science from its metaphysical roots. For illustrative purposes, let us take a short trip through this thinking.

As we noted in Chapter 4, in Aristotle’s cosmology the planets and the stars are carried round the heavens on nested solid crystalline spheres that function clockwork-like through a sort of friction drive with the outermost sphere being moved by the Unmoved Mover. In the synthesis of Aristotle’s philosophy and Christian theology by Albert Magnus in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Aristotle’s unmoved mover is identified with God and so the crystalline spheres became a constituent part of mediaeval cosmology, but cosmology as the world until then understood that term. This is important, once again, because that view associates all of creation with God as its source; cosmology tells us much about the thinking of the people who hold it. Revelation rather than mere observation is the key to understanding. The thinking is that observation leads to Revelation, meaning that we can also come to know and understand a bit of the mystery of God through His works – i.e., Creation.

With the growth of humanism, epistemological thinking begins to come to the forefront. Observation becomes the child of and offset to skepticism (the means by which Scholastics came to approach and understand Revelation). So rather than the ‘facts’ of the Creation Story in Genesis being sufficient to explain the world (i.e. that sacred space called Creation, its origin, its purpose, and its end), the onus

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<sup>4</sup> Make no mistake, a majority of the population still retains a high level of illiteracy, but that is changing.



shifts to *observation* and Myth begins losing its hold. The effect of this is to call into question the older Aristotelian/Christian notion of the nature, purpose, and end of Creation. It is rapidly becomes clear in this environment that a Revelation-based cosmological view was something that is insufficient to the observations and had to be abandoned in favor of the empirical 'facts'.

One of the reasons this debate could even take place was (like most other things of this period) based in the rediscovery of Stoic natural philosophy. The basics of Stoicism (a 3<sup>rd</sup> century fusion of the earlier philosophies of Plato and Aristotle) like the idea that life should be lived in accordance with nature and controlled by virtue, self-denial, asceticism, restraint and denial of worldly pleasures, and the like had been previously incorporated into Christianity centuries before but for the Fathers it was Jewish and Plato's cosmology, not Stoic, which did more to inform earlier theology. Because of these integrations and the dominance of Aristotelian natural philosophy in the Late Middle Ages there is a tendency to forget that it was only one of four main competing philosophies in antiquity. In their time the natural philosophy of the Stoics was more dominant than that of Aristotle.

That said, the nail in the coffin, so to speak, was officially hammered in by Tycho Brahe (1546-1601) who is credited with proving that a large comet in 1577 was *above* the moon (above the moon and farther from earth and therefore outside of the crystalline sphere containing the earth) and not *below* it (below the moon closer to the earth and therefore within the sphere) as would have been true in Aristotle's cosmology. The sum effect being if the separate spheres existed, the comet would have destroyed those different spheres as it passed through them on its flight. As is true not only in this work but in most of history the real story is much more complex and involved various differing factors, but this suffices. The impetus for the question of the origination place of comets came about with the onset of a spectacular series of comets in the 1530s. In order to settle the question the decision was made by Tycho and many other astronomers to measure the parallax (the apparent differences in position of an object when viewed from two different points) of that latest comet in 1577. The results of that experiment were at best contradictory and at worst inconclusive but adequate enough to lead to a consensus of several leading observers and in the end their supra-lunar/non-crystalline view became accepted.

## And Your Question Is...?

So what? Unlike Aristotle, the Stoics did not differentiate between the 'sub-lunar' and the 'supra-lunar' spheres. The whole universe was a whole, all the same, and filled with *pneuma* (objects in and of themselves), like planets and comets, with no notion of see-through crystalline spheres. This naturally created a debate between two diametrically opposed cosmologies. This movement from the Judeo-Christian-Aristotelian-Revelation sense of the universe being segmented into this new Stoic-Scientific-Epistemological idea of the universe as a whole draws into the light the differences in the theological understandings of nature, wisdom, reason, fact, and truth and the Modern period's scientific understandings. So the question is, was this movement powerful enough in itself or is there any parallel within the Church?

From Brahe's scientific argumentation we turn to the Jesuit St. Robert Bellarmine's (1542-1621) theological one. From his research he contended that the Scriptures and the Church Fathers only mention a possibility of *three* heavens and therefore the crystalline spheres which are eight in number could not be considered the nature of Creation as God created it. This means that within the hierarchy of the Church there were also arguments against the traditional cosmology. As a side note, the alternative he proposed that the heavens were liquid and that the planets and other objects like comets swam through them like fish. It is often forgotten, or at least begrudgingly accepted, that the Jesuits were among some of the most important and influential astronomers of their time, and that the Vatican boasts one of the original observatories (it is still in use today, by Jesuits among others). Bellarmine was

also one of the most influential theologians of this time. So what? Well with both sides arguing the same point against Aristotle's clockwork-friction-drive-of-the-spheres thing to explain the apparent movements of the planets and stars, astronomers were forced to find an alternative explanation, one that would have far-reaching consequences.

In all of this (and in light of this), something for us to keep in mind is that even the scientific enquiry of this time has some basis in or at least is still a reaction to Revelation. That is to say, the framework for understanding continues to have Revelation as its starting point. In fact Kepler's work on planetary movement was driven by his theological convictions; Leibniz's work on relativity as opposed to absolute time and space, like Augustine's before him, was part a theological debate. So the theological, philosophical, and scientific discussions of this time share a basic, common thread. Scholastic skepticism has created a situation where everything is called into question (including Scholasticism). This is the basis for Rene Descartes' famous *cogito ergo sum* ("I think therefore I am") statement, where he is really talking about 'what can I know?', and ends up not with God as the Prime Mover but with 'me' and my ability to think which then lead me outward to the World (and by association, God). Humanity, not God is becoming the rational center of the universe.

## ***Transubstantiation***

So, in what must seem like a 160 degree turn, we will approach a term most associated with Thomas Aquinas and the Scholasticism of the previous period. It is actually another good discussion point for understanding the differences in the thinking not just of the time but of the reformers as well. In a homo-centric epistemological universe, what is the science of the sacred?

*Transubstantiation* is the word Thomas of Aquinas uses to describe the nature of the *Eucharist*, the mandate/gift of Body and Blood given to the Apostles at the Last Supper. In the East and the West the earliest Traditions and Scriptures of the Church state the importance of this mystery as a *sign* of Jesus' presence and its centrality to understanding both the Church and Christology. Those merits or deficiencies will not be discussed here. In this context we will continue the discussion we are having about how people are thinking about things.

If the Church teaches that the bread and wine offered on the altar become the true Body and true Blood of Jesus, the scientific/skepticism question is, 'how?' For Aquinas, it is a question born of skepticism; for Martin Luther (1483-1546) it is a question of authority, (as in, by what authority does a corrupt hierarchy teach such a doctrine by relying on the wonky theology of an out-dated intellectualism?).

Thomas starts, as is to be expected, from his Scholastic/Aristotelian roots. The word 'substance', Aristotle tells us, means 'what makes a thing a thing', that is, the aspects of a thing which helps us identify it as that thing; how we know a person from a dog, and even how we know something is a person or a dog. The things which distinguish one person from another or one dog from another are known as its 'accidents'. The fact that one human has red hair and another has blond does not stop either one from being a human. So, actual instances of things are made up of *substance* and *accidents*.

Ergo the *substance* of bread or of wine is different from its *accidents*, just as their substances are different than Jesus' (hopefully we can easily distinguish a piece of matzo from Jesus). Now here is where the tricky part of trying to explain a mystery runs up against the mystery itself. When the Holy Spirit, through the actions of the priest, *consecrates* the bread and the wine, their substances change into Jesus' substance; their accidents – the characteristics which help us to identify them physically as bread and as wine – do not change, hence the *trans-substantiation*, and not trans-accidentation.

Luther is ultimately unable to avoid or abandon this language in his discussion, but still the idea that the substance of something can disappear (what happened to it?) while its accidents remain is somewhat hard for the new mind to swallow. Luther counters the Scholastic argument with a new term

'*consubstantiation*', which, if you have been following the premises of the argument means that Jesus' substance and the substances of the bread and the wine, co-habitate<sup>5</sup>, meaning that its accidents don't enter into it. Observable reality is satisfied.

Calvin thought they were both crazy and went the symbolic rather than the sign route.<sup>6</sup>

## Free Willie

Next, let us take on another of the main controversies as embodied in the discussion of freewill. Think back on Augustine (*Chapter 13*). For humans there is the time after Creation but before Adam ate of the Tree where things are in balance and this is in contrast to the period after this sin, the time of imbalance. That is, humans had been created in balance: able to sin or not to sin; that is, they originally truly had free will. But sin is slavery; it takes away freewill, so when Adam sinned, his sin threw off that balance, permanently disfiguring and corrupting human nature such that all of his descendants (us) inherit this corruption (Original Sin). We cannot do anything to earn release from this slavery; it is now part of our nature. This means that left to our own devices (which is what sin basically is, turning away from God), with only our broken and corrupt human judgment to guide us, we are unable *not to sin*, that is, we have a built-in *concupiscence* or *propensity* to sin. While through the divine spark we can recognize our brokenness and take steps to move away from sin, our will, by itself, cannot free us from *slavery* to sin no matter how hard we may personally try. Fortunately we are children of God and saved by the death of Jesus and the power of the Sacraments. So, through no merit of our own, God bestows Grace upon us. This is the means of overcoming our sinful natures, but leaves us still able to sin, i.e. restored to the original balance. Sin still exists and is still punishable, whether we take advantage of Grace or not.

Jump forward now. There has developed in this period a narrow focus on the idea of 'free grace' (grace without merit) and the idea of *sola fide* (by faith alone) and Martin Luther (1483-1546) is their poster child. The question of the nature of Grace and the effects of Grace are the driving force behind these arguments, so at its core this scuffle takes place within the *soteriological* realm (ends, remember?). The basic position of all sides is that God justifies the sinner because of their belief in Jesus Christ. The Free Grace thinking extends this and is basically that *nothing you do can win you Grace*, but once you get that 'free gift of grace' through *faith* (belief), you *always* have it; what we might know as being 'born again', that 'accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior' moment. So, by 'faith alone' (*sola fide* – believing in Jesus) we are saved. We can juxtapose this with the idea of 'Faith alone'.

This is part and parcel of another of Luther's thesis, the *sola scriptura* (scripture alone) position, or the idea that the Bible is the *only* inspired and authoritative word of God, and is therefore the only reliable source for Christian doctrine. From what we have seen, this is a major divergence from the idea of Scripture *and* Tradition together as the reliable source for doctrine in that the Judaic, Orthodox, Catholic and Coptic traditions hold that the Scriptures can and must be interpreted within Tradition, not just as they stand on their own. Under Luther's view, individual revelation is part and parcel of interpretation of the Scripture, because the meaning of Scripture is open, plain and therefore available to the priesthood of all Christians and is not reserved to the Magisterium.

These and other 'sola' arguments were foundations for Luther and similar voices who saw the authority of Rome as having, first, lost that authority (if in fact it ever had any), and second, as twisted

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<sup>5</sup> The moral admonishments and precepts against co-habitation outside of sacramental marriage do not enter into this argument.

<sup>6</sup> Recall our discussion of the difference in sign and symbol from Chapter 1.

away from the Scriptures through human imposed interpretations. Consequentially it needed to be replaced or even further, that any vestige of it was part of the redirecting of the original Church (as it existed in what was being considered the apostolic period: any time before Constantine legalized Christianity) and need to be eradicated.

For the most part, Erasmus initially sought to stay above the fray but he felt that the reformers were diverging from teachings rather than trying to correct them and therefore looking to re-form the Church rather than reforming it, prompting him to start a campaign against them. Within that fracas, in 1524 he published the treatise *On the Freedom of the Will* and in 1525, Luther responded with what is commonly translated *The Bondage of the Will*. Nowadays Erasmus' take is often considered more philosophical and Luther's more theological, but I believe that is a misreading of Erasmus, or at least a misplaced desire to over-secularize of Erasmus' thought, possibly influenced by Luther's response. Still, Erasmus' humanist Augustinianism and Luther's narrow Augustinianism are at odds, but certainly both men sincerely defend positions which arise from the same source.

## Bound And Determined

Erasmus starts humbly enough: *"I admit that many different views about free choice have been handed down from the ancients about which I have, as yet, no fixed conviction, except that I think there to be a certain power of free choice."* (*The Freedom of the Will*) He then less humbly undertakes a discussion of what he sees as the definition of 'freewill'. Recall our discussion of Augustine's ideas on freewill. For Augustine, freewill is the limitless capacity within us for good or for evil which is held in balance and Grace is the gift of God to help us keep the will in balance. God is the source of all things and the Prime Mover. By humble submission of the human will to the Divine Will we are able to find peace and happiness.

So Erasmus writes *"By freedom of the will we understand in this connection the power of the human will whereby man can apply to or turn away from that which leads unto eternal salvation."* (*ibid*) So, similarly to Augustine, freewill is that thing within us whereby we go towards God or turn away from Him. But it does not belong to the person alone, in a vacuum and outside of God as he further expounds: *"Two causes meet in the same work, the grace of God and the human will, grace being the principal cause and will a secondary, since it is impotent without the principal cause, while the latter has sufficient strength by itself. Thus, while the fire burns through its natural strength, the principal cause is still God, who acts through the fire. God alone would indeed suffice, and without Him fire could not burn. Due to this combination, man must ascribe his total salvation to divine grace, since it is very little that the free will can effect, and even that comes from divine grace which has at first created free will and then redeemed and healed it. Thus are placated, if they can be placated, those who will not tolerate that man has some good which he does not owe to God."* (*ibid*)

God's grace is certainly sufficient to the task of saving us, but that would lessen us as humans. *"God created us without us: but he did not will to save us without us."* (Augustine, *Sermon 169*) Simply put, God's grace is primary, human will secondary, but human will must be considered as a human trait somewhat independent of grace because *it has to be free*; to argue otherwise would make God responsible for the good *and* the bad in the world because the will, as Augustine describes it, is the means of good and evil action within us. *"Those who deny any freedom of the will and affirm absolute necessity, admit that God works in man not only the good works, but also evil ones. It seems to follow that inasmuch as man can never be the author of good works, he can also never be called the author of evil ones. This opinion seems obviously to attribute cruelty and injustice to God, something religious ears abhor vehemently. (He would no longer be God if anything vicious and imperfect were met in him.)"* (*The Freedom of the Will*)

Luther fires back. In his response to Erasmus, Luther was vehement: “*These statements of yours are without Christ, without the Spirit, and more cold than ice: so that, the beauty of your eloquence is really deformed by them. Perhaps a fear of the Popes and those tyrants, extorted them from you their miserable vassal, lest you should appear to them a perfect atheist.*” (*The Bondage of the Will*) Focusing on Augustine’s idea of the *slavery* of sin, he maintained that sin completely incapacitates the human will, making it impossible for humans to work out their own salvation, meaning that they are absolutely incapable of bringing themselves to God. Ultimately humanity is so dominated by Satan per our sin, God is the only power great enough to save us because Satan would only bow to greater and stronger power, i.e. God.

This is where the idea of *sola fide* comes into play: when God redeems a person, he claims them completely, overpowering any hold which Satan may have over them. He redeems the entire person, including the will, which then and only then is liberated to serve God. “*God has promised certainly His grace to the humbled: that is, to the self-deploring and despairing. But a man cannot be thoroughly humbled, until he comes to know that his salvation is utterly beyond his own powers, counsel, endeavors, will, and works, and absolutely depending on the will, counsel, pleasure, and work of another, that is, of God only.*” (*ibid*)

This sense of humility as abject “*self-deploring and despairing*” is the hallmark of Luther’s thought.<sup>7</sup> To be humbled is to be brought low; to be truly humbled, one must give up all hope of personally managed ability to be saved – to do otherwise is not to be humble “”. It is the result of his interpretation of Romans. But the effect is that even the human will is nothing without God. Both assign the human will a secondary position; both give all acknowledgement to Grace; the difference being the place of the will in the whole operation. For Luther, God’s grace restores the balance, but only after utter surrender of the individual will to that grace. For Erasmus, the idea that the human will could become ‘unfree’ makes no sense because how can a will which is not free make a decision?

Keep in mind that both Luther and Erasmus were not merely debating the subject in esoteric or abstract terms. For each there is no disconnect from the only reality: God. In their world God is real, Satan is real, the good person goes to heaven the evil one to Hell, period. What is at stake is the *very real question* of whether or not all humans, born in a broken state because of the sin of Adam, are free and able to do good and thereby be saved. To be more precise, they were debating about the nature of humanity as it too is related to its soteriology.<sup>8</sup> The problem was not merely a *moral* one but a *spiritual* one. The question, in other words, is not just whether someone is good or bad; but the question is ‘how is humanity saved?’ Is salvation a work of one’s own efforts, or is it cooperation between the weakened human will and God, or is it a work of the sovereign God apart from any contributions of people? Why would any of this be a problem? Well, in order to rebuild St. Peter’s in Rome into that magnificent edifice we see today a lot of money was needed. Some of that money was raised by the selling of many things, like ecclesial offices, relics, and something else called indulgences (more on those later). If one could buy one’s way into things, then one could accomplish salvation on one’s own (one could point to the power of the ‘widow’s mite’: *Mark 12:38-44; Luke 20:45-21:4*). Can the good works one does, building churches, giving to the poor, even praying make any difference to one’s salvation, or is it only about *belief* in Jesus?

Calvin’s take involved the idea of *predestination*, but more on that later.

## Humble Pie

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<sup>7</sup> This sense is picked up by Calvin, and eventually produces Jonathon Edwards’ *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741).

<sup>8</sup> In this sense then, of how we come to be saved, it is dealing with *ends*, making it soteriological.

These differing views of humility seem odd since both were produced by Augustinian monks. What we must keep in mind is that the difference really lies in Modern thought and the emphasis on humanism. Luther's position shows repugnance for this thinking – humans are unable to do *anything*. For him the premise put forth by Erasmus, a proud and self-centered thinking puts one at least on par with God and at worst above God. Humans are not perfect; they are flawed and unable to produce anything resembling the perfection of what God can do. This goes back into some of the philosophical arguments we have not discussed, but we need not over-think that. Suffice it to say that Luther found Erasmus' position untenable, and therefore *“without Christ, without the Spirit, and more cold than ice”*. Erasmus, for his part, while reflecting humanist thinking, also relies on the idea of humans being the *“image and likeness”* of God, as having some part and parcel of the perfection of the will of God and that restored by Jesus. Humans must be completely free, of and on their own, or else God becomes a monster, a puppet master creating an untenable position in which humans are unable to act at all, and therefore cannot be held accountable for actions which they are unable to make. It is the thinking which made More respond with *“In your sense of fairness, honest reader, you will forgive me that the utterly filthy words of this scoundrel have forced me to answer such things, for which I should have begged your leave. Now I consider truer than truth that saying: 'He who touches pitch will be wholly defiled by it' (Sirach 13:1). For I am ashamed even of this necessity, that while I clean out the fellow's shit-filled mouth I see my own fingers covered with shit. But who can endure such a scoundrel who shows himself possessed by a thousand vices and tormented by a legion of demons, and yet stupidly boasts thus: 'The holy fathers have all erred. The whole church has often erred. My teaching cannot err, because I am most certain that my teaching is not my own but Christ's,' alluding of course to those words of Christ, 'My words are not my own but His who sent me, the Father's' (John 12:49)?" (Responsio ad Lutherum)*

Obviously all sides need to work on the whole humility thing.

## Putting It All Together

'Modern' thought begins to develop in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, and has been surpassed (perhaps) by other modes of thinking, but at its core, as Scholasticism informed the centuries before the Renaissance, we are still in the 'modern' era, influenced by many of the Enlightenment thinkers. But it is the movement away from Faith and toward belief, from sacred conscience to human judgment, from the miraculous to the scientific, from profane things in a sacred world to sacred things in a profane world which catches our eye during this period.

Initially, like the science of the day, there was not a sense so much of Catholic/Protestant as there was of 'camps', like the camp of 'Luther' or of 'Bellarmine'. When Bellarmine preached, both Catholics and Protestants showed up. In 1576 when Bellarmine returned to Italy to take on the *Chair of Controversies* recently founded at the Roman College he attempted to systematize the various controversies of the time, and made an immense impression throughout Europe, in all of the camps. He was so eloquent that in Germany and England special chairs were founded in order to provide counteract his works.

For us the task is a constant struggle to understand each thinker within themselves. Authority to make pronouncements on Revelation, especially Scripture, becomes the next big struggle, and will challenge us to be objective. Many groups and factions want to quote (and misquote) each thinker to prove or disprove a point, rather than keeping the quote within the context of the individual and their times.

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*“There are those who hate Christianity and call their hatred an all-embracing love for all religions.”*

G. K. Chesterton, *N*

*"The Atoms of Democritus And Newton's Particles of Light Are sands upon the Red Sea shore,  
Where Israel's tents do shine so bright."*

**William Blake, *Mock On, Mock On*, Voltaire, Rousseau**

## Reform

Now that we have set the historical and intellectual stage, let us take on the 800 pound gorilla. We can think of the Western Schism or Reformation in two ways, as a complete breaking with orthodoxy, or a relaxing of perceived error which had crept into the Church. The difference between reforming and re-forming is subtle, as is the question of fixing what is broken or replacing it.

### ***Where's The Beef?***

It may seem that we have gotten a bit ahead of ourselves in the last lesson, but do not worry, we are just leapfrogging again. There is an increasing rift developing between the hierarchy and the man in the street. As an offshoot of the ongoing struggle with the papal decline talked about in *Chapter 15*, the overall centralized authority of the Church came under question. This is nothing new, so we will take a quick jaunt backwards to the 14<sup>th</sup> century for an example. John Wycliffe (1328-1384) became discontented with scholasticism, clerics, the papacy, the Church and its teachings in general and just about everything else that involved humans I believe. As an alternative, he promoted the idea of salvation through study of the Bible as opposed to rituals officiated by priests, an idea we see lingering into the 16<sup>th</sup> century. For this reason he translated the Vulgate into English. His teaching on the “invisible church of the elect”, a *symbolic* community made up of those *predestined* to be saved (which puts him in direct conflict with the Church’s teaching that the Church was a ‘visible sign’ in the world) also seems to have had some staying power. The ability of people to become disenchanted with the Church was nothing new, and the authoritarian nature of the hierarchy is certain to chafe even the most patient of saints at times.

The fight between Luther and the Catholic Church represents the fight of many.

### ***Day Tripper***

As we have discussed, Authority and Truth are closely related. Without authority, how can you be guaranteed that something is the Truth? With the loss of confidence in the authority within the Church and the growth of belief as the measure of Faith, the ready availability of Scripture through printing and rising literacy rates produces the perfect storm. It also begins a struggle *for* authority.

Case in point. In 1582, in a bid to stem the drift of Easter in the Julian calendar, Pope Gregory XIII sanctioned a new reckoning of the year. In order to accomplish it, he first ordered that everyone jump the calendar ahead by 10 days (effectively removing those days from that year forever) and second introduced a change to curb any further error by declaring that only century years (such as 1600 or 1700) divisible by 400 would be leap years. We count this a nothing today, but then, with the papacy’s authority in question, and many groups in open rebellion, this was completely rejected in some areas.<sup>9</sup>

This move is seen by some as another example of humans messing where only God has power. On the one hand, it is just a calendar (a human invention to start with) but on the other it also represents the liturgical calendar and who are these men (i.e. by what authority do they act) that they can tell the stars and the planets to move ahead? This is just indicative that anything which the diminished hierarchy pronounces *or has ever pronounced* is of questionable origin.<sup>10</sup> But the fact is, as we have discussed previously, reform, even the reform of the calendar, is nothing new for the Church – reaching back to its

<sup>9</sup> In fact it was not until the *British Calendar Act* of 1751 that the English added the now necessary 11 days and synced their calendar with Europe.

<sup>10</sup> It also points to a bit of nose-despite-your-face thinking, but that is nothing we need to comment on.



earliest days. In the two centuries leading up to this time many of the modern orders of monks are the result of cries for reform of both Benedictines and Church practices. Most of this we have touched on before but if you think about it, the early 16<sup>th</sup> century was an especially bad time to enter the clergy if you were looking for peace and contemplation. The systemic crisis of the last few decades, especially in Northern Europe, has spread through all levels of the Church. The printing press has allowed for the wholesale production of pamphlets and tracts, distributed and supported by itinerant priests, self-proclaimed preachers, and indigent monks, giving voice to not only the grievances of the theologians but *of the faithful as well*. Local priests and monks were themselves separated from the upper levels of the hierarchy prompting them to also join in the call for action.

At the nucleus of the movement was the increased secularization of the Papacy, especially by Italian families and the German and French kings. The papacy had become just one of many monarchs participating in the diplomatic intrigues throughout the European courts as it strove for political supremacy in the divided Italy, fighting in the seemingly endless civil wars which caught the most vulnerable between competing loyalties for which they cared little. By this time the only interest most of the Popes showed in their universal flock was financial in nature. They ceased to be perceived as the spiritual or doctrinal authority and had become just another one of the ills thrust upon society. When the Popes began regarding themselves first as worldly princes and only secondly as head of a Church dedicated to Christ, they did not practice their calling and were neglecting their spiritual and ritual duties.

This is partially because the costs of protecting the interests of the Church in the form of Papal armies and the extensive rebuilding of Rome were enormous. The practice of financing these needs by various undertakings like simony, selling holy relics, and indulgences enraged men like Martin Luther and Erasmus since the deterioration of the Papacy had spread through the entire ecclesiastic hierarchy with the theology and the laity at the bottom suffering more than ever. In Germany particularly, the laity was squeezed from both the political and the religious side. When the hierarchy was not collecting money directly for the papacy, they did it at their own initiative as feudal princes all having the end effect that not only the papacy but clergy and the monasteries as well had lost their moral authority. Teaching and actions no longer meshed. Unable to connect with the established rituals the faithful and the local prelates turned to devotions, wandering preachers, and personal exploration as protection against such unstable times. Theologians wrestled with this change, unable to completely abandon the high Scholasticism yet sensing its failure. The complete detachment of spirituality from religion had not yet taken place but the pressures from both religious and scientific fronts were creating a situation where religion is becoming the enemy of the people and not the source of comfort it proclaimed to be.

## Luther

Martin Luther (1483-1546) was one of major voices of those who railed against the intellectualism of Scholasticism in the face of the abuses of the hierarchy. Saints, they say, are made every day in the fires of daily life, and this period of time is no different. The struggle to maintain a balance between order and conscience is becoming a losing battle.

Born in Germany, his father was characterized as having a violent temper and his mother as being modest and prayerful, but brutality seems to have been a staple of his home life as he claimed that both beat him severely and often enough that he eventually ran away and joined a monastery. Throughout his early school days he also appears to suffer from bullying there as well. He studied law and philosophy (in which he earned his degree) where he was influenced by at least one of his teachers who was an



**Figure 6: Martin Luther**

Augustinian friar.<sup>11</sup> In 1505, Luther himself entered the order, and much later he confessed that it was fear which made him take the vows. Whatever the reason, one can glean from his writings that he was extremely scrupulous and suffered from great fear and guilt, as well as an unhealthy view of suffering and condemnation. I hesitate to draw too many conclusions because most of the anecdotes about Luther's monastic life (like Erasmus') come from later recollections of which do not bear up even to his biographers who are rather frank in their assessments of them, saying that they are somewhat exaggerated and frequently contradictory and misleading. His claim that he was forced to change his baptismal name Martin to Augustine (which seems to have bothered him greatly) have no precedence or mention in the rule for the Augustinian Order. His further claim to never have seen a bible belies the Augustinian practice of having the novices "read the Scripture assiduously, hear it devoutly, and learn it fervently" (*Constitution for Order of St. Augustine*). All that aside, to the monks and masters within the monastery he seems to have been fairly happy as a young monk, and in 1507 he is ordained (something which probably would not have happened had he shown any major reserve or outright hostility).

He began teaching and continuing his studies at the new University of Wittenberg. For some reason he heads to Rome, where he meets up with the likes of Cardinal Cajetan (1469-1534), a Dominican (like St. Thomas Aquinas) who while a brilliant theologian and acquaintance of Erasmus, was something of a humanist even in theological matters, stressing the freedom of education and the exploration of theological ideas. As a quick note here, to state it again, the problem with understanding the motivations and rationale behind Luther's change of heart is that it is hard to extract his early feelings from his later writings on them. He does not come back from Rome and his many encounters there and begin his tirade against Rome and all things pope-ish. He continues to enjoy success in his teaching, is appointed sub-prior and then vicar, and looks as if to have a great strength of faith, even braving the plague of 1516 to serve the ill. Still he later says that while in Rome practicing an ascetic devotion which involved a certain amount of physical pain (climbing on his knees up the *Scala Sancta* – thought to be the actual staircase Jesus climbed in the Praetorium in Jerusalem) the passage from St. Paul in Romans suddenly flashed through his mind: "The just shall live by faith", upon which he immediately abandoned the practice. Whatever, something aroused in him that could not be stilled by his studies or his responsibilities.

## ***Here I Stand (Someone Said To Stand Here?)***

The signs indicate that everything began to seem a burden. He begins to act against all that he lived, whether out of revulsion or an overwhelming sense of guilt and vocational confusion once again this writer cannot say. The evidence does suggest (to this writer) that he exhibited a great and unfounded anxiety and an obsessive fear that everything was a sin which, as it so happens at least according to Catholic doctrine, is not the case. He began a campaign of rule infractions, breaches of monastic discipline, distorted ascetic practices all of which invoked an increasing severity of reprovals, culminating in a hatred of his monastic life and even hating God 'to the point of blasphemy'. Along with all of these run-ins with the authorities, he developed convulsive spasms, the consequence being his life became unbearable, especially, and forgive the crudeness here, serious gastronomical problems including severe constipation. He seems to have retreated and abandoned devotions in favor of study which also seems to have created a Catch-22 situation for him: the more things he abandoned the greater his sense of sin, mixed with the growing apprehension that the sin was to have these devotions but not *faith* (belief).

He saw nothing in himself but wickedness and corruption and his vision of God, probably a direct result of his family life, was wrath and vengeance. His release from the cycle comes from his complete

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<sup>11</sup> A term that has not been well explained. Technically, a monk is someone who belongs to a community, separate from the world (like the Benedictines) and a friar is someone who, while part of a monastic order, is more out in the world (like the Franciscans). The set of monks contains friars but not all monks are friars.

and utter abandonment of the things he associates with this fear and loathing. Everything which the Church offered, devotions, sacraments, rituals paled with the idea of *faith*. Naturally enough, from the corruptions and abuses within himself those in the Church also became a focus. He became increasingly confident in his understanding and that begins to inform his arguments. Scripture becomes the only pure means of understanding.

The Dominican monk John Tetzel bears a mention at this point. History judges him as both a theologian and a snake oil salesman, and this writer refuses to comment for the reason that he has really not looked too deeply into it. Suffice it to say, Tetzel was preaching in an area adjacent to Luther in Wittenberg, and the effect he had on some of Luther's flock led Luther to put his 'open-letter' of 95 Theses (issues) out to the university community in 1517.<sup>12</sup> Tetzel was an enthusiastic preacher and his description of indulgences was, perhaps even to him, a bit over the top, placing theology above the actual doctrine. He countered to Luther with 106 Theses, calling Luther's Theses not just a discussion of the abuse of indulgences but an attack on the Church's teachings about penance and atonement, at least as he understood them. Luther, rather than responding to Tetzel directly, continued to keep the debate public.

## ***Once More Into The Breach Dear Friends***

Luther was dealing not only with those within the Church establishment but those, who like him, also wanted reform. Luther's solid belief in his interpretation also meant that there was little room for any other interpretation (for fear of error). He was in a constant struggle to keep a balance between people from going too far and the corrupt doctrines he was seeking to redress. He was attacked from both sides, one for being too militant and the other for not going far enough, more than ever once he threw in with the political powers in Germany.

There are two ideas to quickly consider here. First is that of *conscience*. Some want to make the word (and therefore Luther's final speech) be the celebration of *humanist conscience* – that sense of the human spirit. In actuality Luther hated humanists and it makes no sense that he would take that moment to suddenly support them. It is to be understood more along the lines of 'revealed guidance from God' that we have already spoken of. Luther's reliance on the Scripture (the revealed word of God) means that he feels his conscience is formed by God Himself. When these folks (on both sides) are talking about conscience, they are talking about God's Wisdom, not their own – though the alternate accusation is hurled at both sides. There is a certain irony though that what he wanted was part and parcel of the movement he despised.

A second idea which was alluded to but skirted in our discussion on Erasmus is that of 'cleric' or 'clerical' or 'clergy'. Technically a cleric is someone who has been somehow received into the ranks of the clergy and by 'clergy' meaning the entire ecclesiastical hierarchy, of which there were several levels and responsibilities. Simply put then, a cleric is one who belongs in some sense to the hierarchy. In times to come it will strictly mean ordination and that they must wear a costume suited to their state, are forbidden to engage in trade and secular business, must observe celibacy, must avoid scandal or the partaking in of scandalous activities, and lastly that they are bound to obey their diocesan bishops or abbots, i.e. a form we would be familiar with today. At this point though, it is a bit looser. Itinerant preachers are now being offered posts in parishes by powerful patrons and by reform minded individuals, once again showing the separation which had developed from the canonical priesthood attached to a bishop and clergy. The sermon, the power of the speaker, becomes the focus within service rather than adherence to unsettled liturgy and ritual actions.

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<sup>12</sup> As to whether he pinned them to the message board on the church's door history is mixed on that opinion – but it does make for good press. In addition, the fastidious Luther posted a copy to the proper ecclesial agent as well who then passed it up the chain.

Luther's revolt against Papacy and Emperor had a deep impact on many of these itinerate preachers and clerics, especially in Germany, who saw up close and personally the plight of the everyday faithful. Many then enthusiastically took up his cause, helping to spread the message of the reformers, while just as many defied him. This growing movement also affected many strictly social reformers as well. Heavy taxation to support an unwieldy ecclesiastical and political structure as well as drought, floods, famine, plague and a small host of other problems was grinding the poor, clerical and lay alike, to rally against the powers which imposed such burdens. And when the going gets tough....well the Germans get more German.

## A Diet Of Worms

In the end it is the copy of the Theses (along with a letter of explanation) that Luther scrupulously sent to the archbishop which really caused all of the problems. The archbishop forwarded them to a consulting body and to theologians at the larger and older university at Mainz. Everyone was in agreement that they were heretical and the Theses, the letter of explanation, and the findings of those consulted were then sent on to the pope, Leo X (1475-1521), who being used to navigating the waters of dissent, took a moment to let everyone breathe and then sent word back to Luther that he needed to appear in Rome to defend his positions. What had started out as a possibly harmless debate at a small university, placed pressure on Luther and caused him to retreat, fearing that leaving Germany would make him lose his home court advantage and place him in the hands of his enemies.

In 1521 a compromise was finally reached and Luther was summoned to Worms (known as a 'diet', meaning a formal meeting, not a weight-loss plan) to renounce or affirm his views before fellow German Johann Eck (1486-1543) who acted as spokesman for the emperor. It ended with the renouncing of Luther's view as a heretical and calling for his eventual arrest but after coming immediately under the protection of the German princes the sentence was never carried out, though in other countries it was enforced against any followers. Leo's successor Adrian VI (1459-1523), a bookish non-Italian from the Low Countries, seemed ill equipped to continue the fight, concentrating his efforts more on overall reform, perhaps in a hope that the problem would solve itself through these efforts, especially as his major concern was the encroaching Turks. His representatives at the discussion were frank in their assessment of the abuses, noting the basic correctness of the complaints being made. He himself hints at the possibility that a pope may make mistakes. As you might guess none of this enamored him with the Curia and as a non-Italian he also lacked popular support for his efforts.

So at The Diet of Worms (which, again, sounds worse than it is – say it with a 'V' – it helps) Luther made his 'here I stand, I can do no other' pronouncement<sup>13</sup>, which garnished him excommunication for his efforts<sup>14</sup>. He was immediately taken under the wing of the German Princes as leverage against the Emperor and the Pope and settled down with a 26 year-old nun. He died as the owner of the new movement but not its king. He lacked (nor desired) the power to control and shape the movement as did others, like Calvin.

In 1530, in a meeting in Augsburg to which Luther contributed but did not attend for fear of arrest, a new creed of sorts was developed by the German reformers to be given to the Emperor to explain their exact positions, which became known as the *Augsburg Confession* (not a penitential confession but a statement of belief). It laid out their exact stance on the ritual/liturgical side of the Church, the desired reforms of clergy, and finally doctrinal ideas. The result was rejected by the Emperor and the Pope

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<sup>13</sup> Though it appears to be a later addition which captures the spirit of the actual statement.

<sup>14</sup> Attempts were made to broker a solution, but Luther, who had sent the Pope a copy of *On the Freedom of a Christian*, publicly set fire to the papal bull *Exsurge Domine* and decree which threatened his excommunication stating something poetically along the lines of 'papal decretals are the devil's excretals.'

(surprise!) as well as some of the other reformers and for our purposes will be considered the final nail in the coffin.

## That's Revolting

In the light of what was seen as a new light shining in Europe mired in the 'Dark Ages', we turn to one of the dark shadows resulting from this period: the German Peasant Revolt (1524-1525). Inspired by the reforms and having thrown off many of the oppressive clergy, peasants in western and southern Germany invoked the same divine law to demand political as well as religious reform. Demanding agrarian rights and freedom from oppression by nobles and landlords they formed an army. Although the revolt was supported by some of the princes and the likes of the Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) its condemnation by Martin Luther sealed its fate. By the end some 100,000 peasants were butchered. Luther was deeply affected by the outcome, and the knowledge of his part in it, and it was his fear of such an outcome which caused him to condemn it in hopes of avoiding it. The resulting reprisals and increased restrictions discouraged any further non-violent or political attempts to improve the peasants' plight and Germany further fractured under the Princes.

It is important for us to remember that at this time, like the science of the time, theological not economic or political ideals drove calls for social change. God's justice and Christ's moral imperative is the rational for individual equality and justice for the poor. Still this is having an increasing societal effect.

## Calvin And Hobbes

While France, Spain, and Italy, through a series of on-going Inquisitions and extremely strong monarchies, held fairly steady against the onslaught of the reformers the style of reforms which commence in Germany begin to spread throughout northern Europe. John Calvin (1509-1564), a French cleric who went to Geneva, sought out there as a legal and political leader as well as a spiritual one, picks up Luther's banner – with a couple of differences.

Calvin, like Erasmus and Luther, was influenced by Augustine but Calvin's sense of ritual, liturgy, and spirituality is shaped differently than any of the others we have talked about so far. While he started in service to the Church, his father's desire that he be a lawyer rather than a priest (more money – another sign of the changing times) means that Calvin was not as shaped by monastery or ordination, but more by secular law. So I give an all too brief mention of him here. The flavor of Christianity represented by Calvinism is much less hierarchical, liturgical...well, frankly, *formal*. Calvin's main thrust is in the area of *justification*.



Figure 7: John Calvin

In brief, Calvinism professes five points which are closely interrelated:

1. **Total depravity:** by nature we are not inclined toward God but sin (evil by nature)
2. **Unconditional election:** God has chosen the saved from all eternity (what we would call the doctrine of *pre-destination*)
3. **Limited atonement:** through Jesus' death, all sin is already atoned for the elect – but for them only
4. **Irresistible or Efficacious grace:** God's grace is applied to those He saves – when God saves you, you are saved
5. **Perseverance of the saints:** the saved will always be saved – any who fall away were never saved.

So in thinking about justification (or 'how are we saved') we can see how Calvin's more grassroots approach comes into play. He is less about theology and more about piety. Calvin takes the doctrine of the priesthood of believers to a deeper level for the same reason. For Luther the sense that forgiveness

lies in God alone, that is, in God's decision to grant it, there was no room for the granting of forgiveness outside of some sacramental form, so while indulgences were wrong, so was the complete abandonment of the Sacrament. Consequentially Calvin's sense of pre-destination, that no matter what you did you were chosen or not chosen did not sit well with Luther.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) is an English philosopher who is very influenced by Calvin's teachings. So what? Well that means that what was influencing religious thinking is becoming part of social and political thinking, but in what is perceived as a separate thing – i.e. a *secular* thing. Hobbes was exposed to European scientific and critical methods which contrasted with the scholastic philosophy which he had learned in his early education. His scholarly efforts became aimed at a careful study of classic Greek and Latin authors. While exiled in France he wrote *The Elements of Law, Natural and Politic* divided into two separate small volumes (*Human Nature, or the Fundamental Elements of Policie* and *the Elements of Law, Moral and Politick*) which were so secularist that they angered both English Anglicans and French Catholics equally. To that end, on his return to England, laws against blasphemy and atheism were passed with his works specifically called out by name. He was not prosecuted but he published no more works within England, though his works continued in brisk trade on the Continent.

## Theresa of Avila

Theresa of Avila (1515-1582) a cloistered Carmelite nun and mystic from a family of converted Spanish Jews became one of the two female Doctors of the Church. All of these amazing things are in the back seat to our concerns, that of her role as a reformer. The Carmelite order is mendicant (like the Franciscans) and Theresa's call to return to abject poverty reflected the people in the streets but was fought by many.<sup>15</sup> I mention her mainly because of her mysticism, that is, as a symbol of the changing nature of religious life, away from the cares of the world and toward the spiritual and to practical spirituality. She speaks in very basic terms about things like prayer, comparing it to a garden you have to care for in stages. Everyday piety, even within devotional practices and the Sacraments, brings one closer to God.



**Figure 8:**  
Theresa of Avila

## Ignatius Loyola

Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556). Like Erasmus he somehow became a cleric at a young age and somehow managed to get released. Raised at court he became a bit of a fop and fancied himself a gallant. Captured by the French after having his legs severely injured by a cannon ball and subsequently poorly reset, he turned away from a frivolous life and began the earnest study of the Church and the Faith.

*“Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul. And the other things on the face of the earth are created for man and that they may help him in prosecuting the end for which he is created. From this it follows that man is to use them as much as they help him on to his end, and ought to rid himself of them so far as they hinder him as to it. For this it is necessary to make ourselves indifferent to all created things in all that is allowed to the choice of our free will and is not prohibited to it; so that, on our part, we want not health rather than sickness, riches rather than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, long rather than short life, and so in all the rest; desiring and choosing only what is most conducive for us to the end for which we are created.”* (Spiritual Exercises, First Week, Principle and Foundation)



**Figure 9:**  
Ignatius

<sup>15</sup> In defense of some of those opponents, the severity of the poverty she desired is seen as unhealthy. Theresa's motto *“Lord, either let me suffer or let me die”* would to some, on the surface, seem to be the desires of someone who is seeking self-harm rather than sanctification; most though, just wanted to keep their cushy lifestyles.

He produced a reform movement for clergy dedicated to intense and deep spirituality, study, and knowledge capable of answering deep theological questions among even the most humble of clergy. It also produced an 'army' of soldiers for Christ, defenders of the Faith and all which that implies.

## Trent Warfare

The Ecumenical Council of Trent (1545-1563). Adrian VI's earlier efforts were eventually taken up by his later successor Paul III (1468-1549), who while deft at promoting his family's interest also showed a sincere desire for reform and reconciliation. In 1537, Paul issued the bull *Sublimus Dei* which forbade the enslavement of the indigenous peoples in America. That year he also made his first call for a council to work through the issues but was rejected by the German reformers, in the form of their refusing to send any delegates.



Figure 10: The Council of Trent

The problem at this time is one of *MO*. How do you begin to address the problems within the Church? There are theological *and* clerical abuses, which are interrelated, but which do you tackle first? Which is the chicken and which is the egg? Do you improve the clergy through regulation and education and thereby improve the theology and the teaching or do you clarify the teachings and then force conformity within the clergy?

Like the Augsburg Confession we will glance over the defining ecumenical council of this period. At Trent it is officially stated, in opposition to Luther's stance of *sola fide*, that faith alone, whether personal or dogmatic, cannot justify humanity; and that only such faith *as is active* in charity and good works can justify. (*Trent, Session 1*) In addition the doctrine of *sola scriptura* is also condemned. For the first time a comprehensive approach to Scripture and Tradition, Original Sin, Justification, Sacraments, the Eucharist in Holy Mass, the veneration of saints, clergy training, practice, and abuse, as well as marriage (both lay and clerical) were all spelled out. Trent lasted for almost 40 years for various and sundry reasons, the least of which was war on various fronts. Still, that is not really that much time in Church history but it is a lot in human terms.

The reforms of Trent were fairly comprehensive and so in this sense there is no 'Counter-Reformation'<sup>16</sup>. The doctrines clarified and the reforms put into place were long in the making and incorporated many of the reformers objections and reflected much of the reformer's thinking (not just Luther and Calvin but of the likes of Erasmus and More as well); these changes are taking place within the time frame of the reformers, not afterwards. The fact that invited people like Calvin were not given individual voices does not mean that they were without influence. Still, without fully embracing the theological changes championed by many of the reformers, their only answer was to re-form and abandon the Catholic Church.

## Henry VIII I Am

Lastly, and somewhat out of order, Henry the VIII (1491-1547) will represent for us a different type of reformer: all of those potentates who wanted to use Luther for their own ends. Henry was only the second monarch of the Tudor dynasty which had only recently been established not by natural succession but conquest in 1485, and there were already succession problems: he only had a daughter (Mary) and England had never had a ruling queen. Though he had been awarded the title 'Defender of the Faith' by the pope in 1521, he liked the idea of a national church, one in which the



Figure 11: Henry VIII

<sup>16</sup> Unless you look at it as the formal rejection of the Reformer's positions, in which case it would be 'Anti-Reformation'.

pope had no authority and he could make his own decisions about how to go about securing an heir. His original Chancellor Thomas Wolsey (1473-1530), had risen to power in Henry's court and, after being appointed Cardinal in 1515, eventually rivaled Henry himself in wealth and opulence but as he failed to gain an agreement to resolve Henry's annulment case from the Pope (who by this time is heavily indebted to the Spanish crown – Catherine of Aragon was Spanish) he began to fall from power in the 1520s. By 1529, Wolsey had even gone so far as to make a 'gift' of Hampton Court Palace to Henry in order to continue to curry favor with the monarch. After his death he was replaced by Thomas More. More, a long-time friend and confidant of the young king, was at first a good match. Henry desired stability over all else and More, with a strong hand, keen legal mind, and quick wit provided it, but he did not follow the king on the matter of his annulment. The conflict was eventually turned over to Parliament to resolve, a move which More opposed on the grounds of authority.

As the king began to change his mind about the nature of the Church, More who had long aided and defended the king began to fall into conflict with him. More's desire for reform seemed to mesh with the king's until the king's intentions became clear, at which time More decided to conceal his. The series of Acts by Parliament cutting back papal power and influence in England, finally realized the compromise which Anselm had so delicately put into motion years before (*Chapter 14*) – Parliament (who had realized King John's compromise with the nobles) and the King now held all of the temporal and moral power of the Church, and bishops merely the spiritual power. Henry, as King of all England, was the sole authority (not just Scripture) there and therefore immune even from papal excommunications. But at the same time, as the sole Church in England, no other group could be allowed. Henry continued what we would consider brutal tactics to keep out not only Catholics but any other who would question the State religion.

In the end, there are two points. First being the historical timing with Luther's revolt which seems to have been quite advantageous to Henry. Second is that similar to Luther, Henry's reformation had produced dangerous Protestant/Catholic and Protestant/Protestant divisions in England which haunted it for centuries. Ultimately, the seized wealth of the monasteries spent on fruitless wars had instead increased the economic strength of the aristocracy and other families in the counties, which in turn was to divide and weaken the Tudor factions. For the most part nothing of what Henry hoped to accomplish came about. It did have the side-effect of also producing split Catholic and a Protestant heirs and the establishment of Parliament as the major player in all religious and dynastic decisions, epitomized in Oliver Cromwell (1599-1658).

## Putting It All Together

With so many voices it was sometimes hard to hear the true message.

It does not help that the competing voices were not always friendly to one another. As desirous the factions were of people like Erasmus to join them, they were truly unable to join even themselves. Catholic retaliation is similarly reflected in Henry who killed any he felt opposed him, and the Calvinists who killed Anabaptists like the Mennonites who in turn felt that the Calvinists and the Lutherans had failed when they joined forces with politicians, falling into the same trap as the Catholics. The bloody war was on.

The Western Schism is complete. Though not explicitly stated there is perhaps a bit of 'I told you so' to be garnished from the Great Schism – the West, with its propensity for intellectual elaboration, has created the environment and the means for its own sundering. At the same time, the act of re-forming rather than reforming created an environment which even Luther abhorred – the continued sundering of Christendom. The continued fracturing of Christians based on doctrine and practice falls directly on the doorstep of this movement from Faith to faith. How can anyone be right if everyone is wrong? Without a true central authority like the Magisterium, an appalling lack of knowledge of the original



languages of Scripture and only translations to work from, how does one distinguish Revelation from interpretation?

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*Once when a terrible schism was rending the seamless garment of the Church, Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria [died 412] addressed his sons and brethren with words of pastoral zeal. We take pleasure in addressing these same words to you: "Dearly beloved, we have all been invited to heaven. Let each, then, according to his abilities imitate Jesus, our model and the author of our salvation. Let us embrace that humility of soul which elevates us to great heights, that charity which unites us with God; let us have a genuine faith in revealed mysteries. Avoid division, shun discord....encourage charity toward one another. Heed the words of Christ: 'By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.'" (Homily in mysticam caenam)...But the common saying, expressed in various ways and attributed to various authors, must be recalled with approval: in essentials, unity; in doubtful matters, liberty; in all things, charity.*

**John XXIII, Ad Petri Cathedram**

*"Let us love God our Lord; let us love His Church. Let us love Him as our father and her as our mother, Him as our master and her as His handmaid. For we are the children of His handmaid. This marriage is based on a deep love. No one can offend one of them and be a friend of the other... What difference does it make that you have not offended your father, if he punishes offenses against your mother?... Therefore, dearly beloved, be all of one mind and remain true to God your father and your mother the Church."*

**Augustine, Commentary on Ps. 82**

*"Whether they wish it or not, they are our brethren. They cease to be our brethren only when they stop saying 'Our Father.'"*

**Augustine, Commentary on Ps. 32**

## Faith And Reason

And so comes the time when Faith comes in contact with the fullness of the humanism of modern secular culture which produces the ideological landscape we are familiar with. The social, political, theological, and religious upheaval of the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> centuries put the Catholic Church on the defensive in Europe and while it sought to re-open itself it also developed something of a siege mentality. But it is no picnic for the other side either. Protestant Europe is struggling to stabilize itself and the 'New World' is opening itself up to all manner of religious thought.

## Mysticism

As a quick aside, there is within the response to modern thought, a growing mysticism. Remember that a mystery is an understanding revealed only by God, unreachable by human reason alone. Piety and devotional actions can make plain to the observer of such practices that there is a mystical framework for life, and allows access to that framework. But Mysticism can also lead to both a fanaticism and emotionalism. One can get lost amidst the religious fervor and end up concentrating on minute aspects of both the Faith and belief in general.

With the loss of a sense of the sacred and the concentration on the rational and empirical, an emotional desert can develop, resulting in a desire to experience the sacred which becomes bound up in the over-emotional. This over-emotional reaction may lead others to an even more stark and severe response, in an effort to avoid the cloud of emotions.

## Breaking With The Past

The 17<sup>th</sup> century begins the period of what is traditionally thought of as the 'scientific revolution' and thus the formal break between science and religion. But it actually is not, as we have discussed, such a clear demarcation. We can see that fact in the earlier alluded to infamous case of Galileo. It really is based on a man, like Erasmus or More, who was a faithful Catholic and who wanted nothing more than for the Church to endorse his already obvious vision of the heavens, and who upon running into the question of authority bowed to it. Understanding that as merely a struggle with authority and not in terms of the understanding of Faith and the control of the Truth places it squarely in humanistic terms and misses the piety and sacred nature of belief. Certainly in terms of the advancement of human knowledge it seems like a setback, but the knowledge was never lost, never destroyed, in fact the transcripts have always been available to read. In fact, for some unknown reason an agreed upon compromise collapsed, setting in motion the perceived nature of the trial. The problem is that a single clearinghouse for knowledge was, especially one as slow as the Church, cramping the style of many thinkers. Universities and printing gradually becoming separate from the Church meant that you did not have to wait to publish or teach. So in one sense the trial is a turning point in the contentious relationship between religion and science, but it is more representative than substantive. Anyway, it is not truly until the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the complete collapse of a general acknowledgment of a central authority that we really begin to see a fundamental break between science and religion, couched in the attitude we see so prevalent today, and a time at which Galileo is held up as both a humanist martyr and patron saint.

Even at the time this break was not appreciated by everyone. Tired of the growing bulldozer of reason and the Protestant response to it, the philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) stated that in order to have religious faith one must accept paradoxes beyond reason — that reason alone was insufficient and contained no path to faith. We must, he says, put aside reason in order to believe, to

take a 'leap of faith' or more properly perhaps, a 'leap to faith.' Science, on the other hand, is considered only the practice of reason but yet its belief is perhaps its hypothesis, and its Faith is its empirical fact.

Is there a third option? Is the Scholastic Age the happy medium?

## Freedom And Religion

Starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Science and Religion are beginning to be framed as two separate worlds. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with folks like the German philosopher Immanuel Kant and social and political philosophers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, we see this as the accepted thinking. So the task for us is to follow the progression of this movement. How did it come about? How is it that men of such learning and high thought could go from associating knowledge with God to seeing them as separate and then from believing in the sacred to not believing in the sacred?

Religiously, politically, and socially the individual and individual rights are becoming the forefront and the very composition of thinking. Humanism has reached the meaning which we apply to it: the human is the center and agent of meaning. This sense of individual rights is pushing the sense of religious freedom, as odd as that might sound. But in the logic of humanism, if the individual is paramount and the individual is the agent of meaning then internal subjective personal choice trumps external pressures and norms. The right of the individual to worship as they see fit is greater than what king or Church dictate.

America was becoming a different kind of battleground. Folks like the Puritans, denied freedom of religion in England (do not forget – anyone who is not Anglican is against the Crown) and hustled out of just about every place they try to settle<sup>17</sup> head for American and the promise of light oversight in return for the very dangerous task of laying claim to and settling land for the Crown.

## Freedom Of Religion

So America becomes the largest plot of land available to practice your beliefs freely – mainly because you are far enough away from the authorities who would normally be hounding you. Leaving England for Holland really does not protect you from others, both Church of England and Rome, who desire to arrest and try you. America offers the comfortable cushion of the Atlantic and a sense of self-rule which is unhampered and unencumbered by the strength of Crown or Church to back it up, that and large savage animals.

While profit may drive their sponsors, many groups come for religious reasons, the main one we think of is of course the Puritans but we can touch on the groups already there, mainly Spanish and French Catholics. Many groups arise in America as well, or come to fruition there. We can think of the Quakers and the Mennonites and the Amish, as well as John Wesley and his circuit riding Methodist preachers. We see this attitude culminating in the American Revolution and in places like Virginia, where Jefferson drafts the first meaningful freedom of religion act (1779) which eventually is embodied in the First Amendment of the Constitution (1791).

The founding fathers are probably concerned less with a particular practice of a particular faith and more with the interference of the practice of any faith with the operation of the government. So ironically, this right to free religious expression is not always so free. Orthodoxy parades about in many masks, both religious and political. Puritans often outlawed the practice of Anglicanism; many colonies adopted a state religion – usually Anglicanism – and forbade or limited the practice of other denominations and Judaism. With the strength of the Catholic French and Spanish to the North and

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<sup>17</sup> I don't know, is it me? Do you suppose it could just be me?

South of the colonies<sup>18</sup>, there is a strong sense of anti-popery which courses through the Protestant English Colonies. Still, places like Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, California, and all along the Mississippi river Catholic missionaries spread the Faith among the native tribes and settlers, which puts more pressure on the colonies to hold fast to their religious faiths. Maryland was founded on the premise of religion tolerance by Calvert Lord Baltimore in his desire to create a haven for English Catholics in the new world. Maryland was one of the places in the whole English Empire where Catholics could hold positions of political authority. Eventually, starting in about 1650 with a Puritan revolt in Maryland and ending with the ascendancy of William of Orange in 1688, the foundational principle of religious toleration failed and Catholicism was outlawed in the state ironically dedicated to the Virgin Mary until after the Revolution.

## Freedom From Religion

Along with this growing personal pietism and stilted sense of orthodoxy, the emergent sense of secular humanism is also channeling religious thought, which we might call the 'God as scientist' trend. In the course of human events it seems more and more that it is human intellect and experimentation which brings those events to fruition – possibly guided, at least initially, by some being. This sentiment is called Deism.

Deism rises out of the growing understanding of the universe of laws, not just the rational laws of the Logos, but now that idea in light of empirical science – the law of gravity, the mathematical laws guiding the movement of the planets, etc.. Deism is the system in which God exists but as a fact known purely on rational grounds, without any reliance on revealed religion or religious authority or holy texts. The image of God as 'clockmaker', who wound up the universe at the beginning of time and then walked away from it, comes from this thinking. The universe does not need God to run it, does not need a God who is imminent, involved in the affairs of the world, and so also does not need any intermediaries – priests, myths, rituals, scriptures. The rejection of non-scriptural authority by the Protestant reformers, the denial of the need for intermediaries, finds its next logical step here. What authority, which in any way smacks of human intervention, can match the revelation which the rational/empirical universe presents us?

In a world of metaphysical uncertainty, Deism then offers a substitute for revealed truth; a truth which can be built solely by the unaided efforts of human reason. It also has the effect of finally the questioning of the authority of Scripture, the very basis for the rational of Protestantism. There is no objective measure of authority or truth – neither magisterial authority nor scriptural authority – the final and only authority is human reason and empirical observation. This is the thinking which leads Thomas Jefferson to cut out the parts of scripture he liked and combined them into his own bible.

It also opens the door to out and out atheism, the questioning of the very existence of the sacred, which cannot be proved empirically or rationally.

## American Religious Culture

In the midst of this Samuel Adams (1722-1803) created nostalgia for the good old days of Puritanism in America. He was of Puritan descent and preached a kind of radical neo-Puritanism, and railed against those not of the ilk. At one moment he is calling everyone to the Liberty Tree with the rally cry of religious and political freedom and the next haranguing anyone who smacks in the least of popery, Roman or Anglican.

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<sup>18</sup> One of the instigators for unrest in the colonies was the Parliamentary approval of Catholicism in Quebec in 1774. Colonists saw this as a threat to their religious freedom.

As said, America was not the bastion of religious freedom which we now envision it to be. There were only three colonies where Catholics could even vote, and in many areas Jews faced similar suppression. The American ideals of “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” only partially translated to freedom of religion.

It is George Washington who articulates the fullness of the idea of American religious freedom applying it to all denominations and faiths in his letter to a Rhode Island Hebrew congregation in 1790. American Jews had been addressing letters to Washington since the year before, starting with the Hebrew Congregation of Savannah, Georgia. In that initial reply, Washington exhibits both his deistic beliefs and only a certain generic benevolence : *“May the same wonder-working Deity, who long since delivered the Hebrews from their Egyptian oppressors, planted them in a promised land, whose providential agency has lately been conspicuous in establishing these United States as an independent nation, still continue to water them with the dews of heaven and make the inhabitants of every denomination participate in the temporal and spiritual blessings of that people whose God is Jehovah.”* It is the letter of 1790 which spells out a more complete vision: *“The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for giving to Mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens.”*

America remains a fiercely Protestant Christian culture, though ironically Catholics remain one of the largest voting blocs. Still, Washington’s notion of religious freedom continues to guide the overall culture, providing rich soil for many denominations, groups and belief systems, all the while maintaining some of Sam Adam’s radical intolerance.

## The French

This leads us to the next echo of the American Revolution and the development of the secular French culture. Religion and faith still play a role in American political culture and so the movement from religious state to a purely secular one bears some examination here. Calvin was driven out of France by reprisals against the reformers, but even after the reforms of Trent the Church and the Crown still made for strange bedfellows.

France had known its share of back and forth throughout the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> with moments of tolerance and intolerance, but for the most part the state religion remained Catholicism. With the Revolution, the close ties of Church to State caused suspicion of all things religious. Thinkers like Maximilien Robespierre (1758-1794) against whom hero of the American Revolution and inciter of change Marquis de Lafayette (1757-1834) failed to control the violence of the Revolution, championed the idea of change through elimination and the violent death of those deemed responsible. He was equally vehement against atheism and he wanted to create a new spirituality, or at least a spiritual revival in France designed by and for the State based on his Deism. In 1794, Robespierre helped to establish an ‘official religion’ which he called the ‘Cult of the Supreme Being’, which really only lasted as long as he did, though the effects lingered on.

After the Revolution of 1789 the French Government went on a Henry VIII like spree, confiscating Church property, sanctioning the destruction of Church property, and the outlawing of priests and any who would harbor them. Combined with the replacement of the state religion of Catholicism with a type of neo-paganism based in personifications of ‘Reason’, (changing churches into temples, even Notre



**Figure 12:**  
**Robespierre**

Dame itself), France began down a road to secularism. Eventually in 1798, French forces, once the champions of the papacy, under the leadership of Napoleon marched into Rome itself and imprisoned the Pope, Pius VI (1717-1799), who died in that captivity.

Finally in 1801, the *Concordant* was signed which eased earlier draconian anti-religious measures until it was repealed in 1905 in which separation of church and state was spelled out. While the Concordant spread 'acknowledgement' and money around, the 1905 agreement sought a more complete severing, and prohibited the government from recognizing any religion or subsidizing religion in any way – like paying clergy (but still retained a bit of influence in the appointment of bishops).

While Catholicism still tends to be the faith of most of the people of France, starting in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with the likes of John Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, a general malaise toward organized religion and even a strong vein of atheism also runs within French culture. Sartre represents the logical conclusion to many of the trends we have discussed. Humanity, alone and isolated in our individualism, can neither connect to others or even any presence outside of oneself without creating a demeaning of the other. Ironically this is partially based on an common observation of human nature, the same situation which religion often tries to overcome.

## Putting It All Together

The struggle of Faith and Reason is not new to religion; in fact it only becomes a struggle with the separation of Faith and Reason. The loss of metaphysics as a discussion of reality, and its relegation to mere moral discussions leads, like Scripture before it, to the logical discounting of relevance even in that area. Without external, objective universals save empirical or mathematically rational ones, discussion of God and the sacred become one-sided. The arguments which reduce love down to chemical reactions within the organic material of the brain seems to take something away from it, yet even the emotional aspects can be 'explained' at a molecular level.

Still it is the further separation of faith from religion which seems to really be the coffin nail. The expression of faith has gone from an active, ritual based participation in the sacred to a passive, intellectual exercise. The centrality of modern humanism and individuality remove both the public practice and the public responsibility which are such a primary element within religion. The individual is no longer beholden to the salvation of the world, and the sacred is reduced to a curiosity within the larger context of human achievement. What separates us in this matter today is not our divergent beliefs but our inability to see those beliefs in a context larger than ourselves.

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*"...the difference between the Ancient concept of the nature of the world and the New concept is, in the Ancient concept the world has a framework of Time, and in the New concept, a framework of Space."*

**John Crowley**, *Little, Big*

"The waters have risen and severe storms are upon us, but we do not fear drowning, for we stand firmly upon a rock. Let the sea rage, it cannot break the rock. Let the waves rise, they cannot sink the boat of Jesus. What are we to fear? Death? 'Life to me means Christ, and death is gain.' Exile? 'The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord.' The confiscation of goods? 'We brought nothing into this world, and we shall surely take nothing from it.' I have only contempt for the world's threats, I find its blessings laughable. I have no fear of poverty, no desire for wealth. I am not afraid of death nor do I long to live, except for your good. I concentrate therefore on the present situation, and I urge you, my friends, to have confidence.

Do you not hear the Lord saying: *Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst?* Will he be absent, then, when so many people united in love are gathered together? I have his promise; I am surely not going to rely on my own strength! I have what he has written; that is my staff, my security, my peaceful harbor. Let the world be in upheaval. I hold to his promise and read his message; that is my protecting wall and garrison. What message? *Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!*

If Christ is with me, whom shall I fear? Though the waves and the sea and the anger of princes are roused against me, they are less to me than a spider's web. Indeed, unless you, my brothers, had detained me, I would have left this very day. For I always say "Lord, your will be done"; not what this fellow or that would have me do, but what you want me to do. That is my strong tower, my immovable rock, my staff that never gives way. If God wants something, let it be done! If he wants me to stay here, I am grateful. But wherever he wants me to be, I am no less grateful.

Yet where I am, there you are too, and where you are, I am. For we are a single body, and the body cannot be separated from the head nor the head from the body. Distance separates us, but love unites us, and death itself cannot divide us. For though my body die, my soul will live and be mindful of my people.

You are my fellow citizens, my fathers, my brothers, my sons, my limbs, my body. You are my light, sweeter to me than the visible light. For what can the rays of the sun bestow on me that is comparable to your love? The sun's light is useful in my earthly life, but your love is fashioning a crown for me in the life to come."

**St. John Chrysostom, *Sermon***

"If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible since, having neither parts nor limits, He has no rapport with us. We are therefore capable of knowing neither what He is nor if He is."

**Blaise Pascal, *Pensees***

## Modern Reason

We arrive finally at not only the last chapter but a time in history and thought in which it can be said we still participate. It is not that human thought has ever lay dormant or stagnant but the last 100 to 150 years of human intellectual development has exponentially increased the scientific knowledge of humanity. It is a one-two combination of Biology and Cosmology which shake the pillars of Heaven.

## Evil Is As Evil Does

But before we get there, let us examine a couple of concepts that lay mixed into the foundation of modern thought. For many, the modern view about the sacred is not a question of intellectual argument, inner spirituality, or even morality, but a question of *evil*. If there is a God, and He is all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing, etc, etc, then why do bad things happen? Not that this is not an age-old quandary, and in fact some religious systems are based around this fact (some for good, some for ill) but the center of attention has shifted; it is no longer in terms of God versus creation but Me versus creation.

So what it comes down to is who is responsible for evil: human will or a cold, uncaring universe? What had earlier been accepted as proper arguments about the problem are now questioned – they assume God and so all explanation must somehow involve Him – because experientially life clearly contains evil and that evil, natural or human created, is observable even without the positing of God. Modern based religious systems like Calvinism presents evil as part of Nature and that we must trust God against the evidence. In an atheistic (god-less) system evil is the result of social/environmental ills, like lack of education, poverty, and the broken cycle of reduced psychological preparation.

We can also ask “Is there even a problem with evil?” Is reality such that evil is just part of everything as opposed to something *abnormal* to the natural order? If that is true then, the metaphysical questions of ethics and morals are really moot – there is not even a need for ethics. We can see this in a system like Christian Science where matter does not exist and therefore neither does evil or at least only to the level we believe in either.

Evil, in a sense, is separate from morality, a separate problem.

## Will You Get That For Me?

The Will is not something we have spoken of in some time, but as it comes into play again, here it is. If evil and good are not things which matters, then the will does not matter, right? So in one way of thinking freewill has several positive aspects like moral responsibility, personal acts, and personal relationships which outweigh the bad effects of freewill. It is better to have free will and the *possibility* of evil than no free will and the impossibility of evil or good (this reflects Augustine’s ideas but does not contain the balance aspect). The other option is to move the will out of the person and into the larger structure of the universe.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), who inspired both Nietzsche and Freud, took this direction. Heavily influenced by eastern religious thought, he also took inspiration from Christianity, with the thinking that any faith that had a man being tortured on a cross as its central emblem couldn’t be entirely bad and its saints, who suffered self-denial and deprecation, had it all down pat and were an inspiration to us all. Life is pain, grief, sorrow and little else, where the will, an indifferent and objective force, drives all to ruin, if not controlled within each person. The will's striving, the constant urge for achievement of ever more ambitious goals causes human unhappiness. Human strife comes from striving; there is never a point where the will can be satisfied, because by its very nature it must keep



developing, striving to reach the next goal. The only defense is to stop willing, what he called “the euthanasia of the will” (*The World as Will and Representation*). This never-ending cycle of willing and suffering can be broken only by stymieing the will through the cessation of the striving, i.e. a Buddhist-like resignation/contemplation.

But the removal of the will from humanity is nothing new. From a Calvinist point of view, with human nature being basically evil, it is logically impossible for God to give us any significant amount of moral freedom and still be able to guarantee our goodness.

## Modernism

No, this is not an attempt to pad this chapter but the word given to a coming together of disciplines culminating in the idea of dogma as *evolutionary*. Modernism is the response to and a result of the growing empirical sciences as well as the existing religious environment. It may be said to arise out of the new scholarship of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century which began to look at the idea of religion and faith in a historical-critical way, but its roots are in the new sense of authority and dogma. We see this trend finding a home in secular philosophy within the thought of the likes of Michel Foucault (1926-1984) and *Structuralism* both of which comes to us out of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century France and maintain that aspects of a culture can be understood through the means of some sort of ‘structure’ (usually language) which is distinct from what is observable and what is within reason.

Before your head snaps off in a double-take, just think of it this way: outside of the Orthodox and Catholic Church authority has become personal interpretation – what God has revealed *to me* through His word. Add to that the growing number of scientific disciplines. As more scientific approaches appeared studies of things like history, a sense of things within the framework of time, became more important. To these thinkers this sense of historicism suggested that ideas and actions are intricately bound up in their history, that is, they are so much a part of the time-frame in which they happen or are expressed. As applied to religion, Modernism states that most of the Hebrew practices and later the dogmas of the Church were time and situational specific innovations that were developed because of specific historical necessity. As we have discussed, Rationalism and the new sciences of textual criticism downplayed the possible role of the miraculous and go to the logical conclusion of God not only as improvable but incapable of ever being known.

Theology as a science is dismissed, and its conclusions were relegated to the same dung heap as metaphysics. As Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) put it, “*Religion is an illusion and it derives its strength from the fact that it falls in with our instinctual desires.*” (*New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*) Religion, no longer considered rational or scientific, was seen as a function of human emotions, caused by and centered on the *feelings* of its believers or some similar hormonal or chemical reaction. It could be argued that there is perhaps some veracity to this line of reasoning as modern theological thinking and religious practice with its disdain for dogma and with a lack of true objective measures concentrates more on individual interpretation, experience, and emotions. Scripture, while seen as the objective foundation, has no objective interpretation, and this leaves adherents short of an argument.

## Closing The Door On The Sacred

Okay, I threw open the doors and mentioned Freud, so let us start in the mid-1800’s. The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the rise of economic theory as well as political theory. Marx, Nietzsche, James, Darwin, Freud, Sartre; these are the intellectual milestones by which we mark our culture today. There are many others, but then this is a popular book on religious thought and not a tome, so we will concentrate for brevity’s sake.

As a general note, a lot of modern systems see faith as belief in God against reason, as opposed to the medieval faith and reason idea.

**Marx:** best known as the father of modern Communism, Karl Marx (1818-1883) and his collaborator Engels (1820-1895) are often misquoted as stating that religion, because it hid a person from their true self, was 'the opiate of the masses'. Religion was the expression, not of a deeper reality but an illusion, a projection of the actual suffering of individuals, masked in ritual and myth and called salvation. But it is not so much religion itself but the mistaking of religion as real which is the problem. *"Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man—state, society. This state and this society produce religion, which is an inverted consciousness of the world, because they are an inverted world. Religion is the general theory of this world, its encyclopedic compendium, its logic in popular form, its spiritual point d'honneur, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the fantastic realization of the human essence since the human essence has not acquired any true reality. The struggle against religion is, therefore, indirectly the struggle against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion. Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people. The abolition of religion as the illusory happiness of the people is the demand for their real happiness. To call on them to give up their illusions about their condition is to call on them to give up a condition that requires illusions. The criticism of religion is, therefore, in embryo, the criticism of that vale of tears of which religion is the halo."* (Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right)

**Nietzsche:** best known for his ideas about the 'superman' (*ubermensch*) and the 'God is dead' quote, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) ushers in the complete rejection of the religious form. For Nietzsche there are no universals, no ultimate Truths in which to have faith and every religion is meaningless dribble, and he is opposed to the genetic strait-jacket of Darwin, where we are some sort of eugenic superhuman or next level of evolution, preferring instead a complete triumph of the *will*. These illusions, we created them – they do not exist on their own and just because we believe them does not make them true. Only those brave few who realize this, and move beyond it (the *ubermensch*), are capable of truly living. We have basically *out-grown* God. *"God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?"* (*The Gay Science*) Only those of the strongest wills stand up and are counted, all others *"from motives of fear the contrasted type has been willed, trained, attained: man the domestic animal, the social animal, the sick animal — the Christian."* (*The Antichrist and Will to Power*)

**James:** less well known than his famous brother Henry, philosopher and psychologist William James (1842-1910) championed the peculiarly American philosophy of Pragmatism (from the Greek *pragma*, which we might translate as '*practical*', through Kant, meaning something which is arrived at through or applied to experience rather than those that are *a priori*). For James, there are also no universals, no gold standard for behavior. He develops a type of relativism which based not on emotion or reason per se but on *what works*. To put it simply: *"Truth is what works."* (*Pragmatism, The Meaning of Truth, and The Will to Believe*) Pragmatism is all about behavior: values and morality and the purpose of philosophy is to help us to understand what has value to us and why. Consequentially ideas and beliefs have value to us only when they work. *"We have to live today by what truth we can get today and be ready tomorrow to call it falsehood."* (*Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*) This is not meant to confuse the issue; James is not seeking Truth, but is explaining the rational for action. Religion therefore, has merit today, if it works. When it stops working, it has no merit. In James the idea of belief

equaling faith is fully articulated. *“Faith means belief in something concerning which doubt is theoretically possible; and as the test of belief is the willingness to act, one may say that faith is the readiness to act in a cause the prosperous issue of which is not certified to us in advance. It is in fact the same moral quality which we call courage in practical affairs;”* (*The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*) That is to say, in a way we operate on Kierkegaard’s *leap to faith* level, not a faith in something or in a collection of truths (Faith), per se, but belief in the truth that even if I am wrong, I have done something, and that something was worth doing. Notice also the idea that faith is connected to the possibility of doubt, placing it in human rational origin not in any revelation.

**Freud:** already mentioned above and to be mentioned below is best known as the father of modern psychotherapy, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) took the idea of religion as illusion into the depths of the mind and the motivation of individuals. He saw religion as ‘Wish-Fulfillment’, an illusion, in this case meaning a belief that is not true but that people want very much to be true, because religion was a response to the repressive nature of society – the rational for why we do not do what we want to do. It is therefore a neurosis, a delusion brought on by distress and guilt. [Freud was an avowed atheist but ironically finds his proof for this when he dabbles in biblical criticism, concluding that his points are true because Moses was not Jewish and that monotheism actually derived from the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten’s religious beliefs.] [In *The Future of an Illusion*, he described belief in God as a collective neurosis based on “longing for a father.” In his last book, *Moses and Monotheism*, something new emerges. There Freud, without abandoning his atheism, begins to see the Jewish faith that he was born into as a source of cultural progress in the past and of personal inspiration in the present. Close to his own death, Freud starts to recognize the poetry and promise in religion.]

**Sartre:** perhaps the best known for his “Hell is other people” line, Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) articulates the logical end of secular humanism; his bold statement has more to do with the fact that we sacrifice our self-realization by binding ourselves to others. For Sartre, there is no such thing as a general ‘human nature’ because there is no God to conceive it. *“If existence really does precede essence, there is no explaining things away by reference to a fixed given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom. On the other hand, if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct. So, in the bright realm of values, we have no excuses behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone with no excuses”* (*Existentialism Is a Humanism*). First we exist, then we choose, then we act, and there is no one to blame for those actions except our self. We are the self-contained vessels of our own conscience.

## Biology

There are two sides to the biology explosion: exterior and interior. Charles Darwin (1809-1882) will represent the exterior and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) the interior.

Darwin is almost a no brainer. The world, not of the cosmos (as with Copernicus) but of ourselves, turns upside down. His theory that biological things evolve as necessary due to external environmental forces stabs at the very heart of humanity. Relative local forces, not God or cosmic laws or the Will, blindly drove us to who we are. Darwin takes the argument completely out of philosophy and metaphysics and places it squarely only within physical adaptation. Adapt or die; a pretty simple message. The need for ethics or morals, souls, God, completely disappears, leaves the realm of the intellect and enters the realm of necessity. Evolution echoes Deism, William James, and Schopenhauer but it does it without the necessity of humanity. It posits a biological system totally determined by random chance and genetics. The best genetics and adapters live, creating a basis for the next level which survives because it is the best adaptation. But adaptation can also leave you hanging. If you adapt and survive into the Ice Age, you die if you cannot adapt to the next period of global warming. There is

no teleology, no end to which anything comes into existence or any end to which it pursues; one only lives for reproduction and dies when one no longer produces.

Freud introduces a 'human element' back into the mix. No matter how we got here or where we are going, we are who we are, but similarly to Darwin there is a sexual basis for that. We do not need to rehash what was said earlier, but as with Darwin we need to examine the effect of his thought on the everyday thinking and action. Like Schopenhauer's 'will to life' and Nietzsche's 'will to power' Freud posits the 'will to pleasure', that is, we actively seek pleasure and avoid pain in order to satisfy basic biological and psychological needs. The *id* is the impulsive, child-like portion of the psyche that operates purely at this level and only takes into account instinctive desire with a total disregard for all consequences. This is a driving principle but at some point we are able to learn to endure pain in order to receive pleasure. The *super-ego* represents this moral component of the psyche but like the *id*, is the unbridled moral sense where everything is black and white. Hence the denial of food or sex or something else, in order to reach a more pleasurable thing is a sign of maturity but can also be (as in a religious context) a delusion of true pleasure. We often deny ourselves the wrong things for the wrong reasons. Moral and immoral actions are balanced in the *ego* and usually reflected most directly in a person's actions. We struggle between irrational desires and fears and an almost overwhelming sense of equally irrational moral rectitude. All of these problems are reflected in religious belief, which is the illusive attempt to make sense of it all.

## Cosmology

The world is a place through which we barely muddle. Physically we are the result of random chance. Psychologically we are caught between the irrational and the over-rational, driven by responses to random actions made about us. Good thing we can rely on the universe around us to give some comfort and grounding, right? The Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg writes that "the more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless." (*The First Three Minutes*) Guess not. The science of the universe highlights the sheer randomness and blind luck which produced everything we know. Weinberg is an example of the thinking which paints a picture of our universe as a vast purposeless place in which we can see no evidence of an origin or a point for ourselves as human beings much less the universe itself.

If the universe defines the edges of reality and knowledge, that is, it is the first item on the list of things which are, then God exists within it and all questions of metaphysics are moot, because they are not about the actual truth but as Marx and Nietzsche would have us believe are illusions, meaningless questions. You might as well ask questions about unicorns – certainly you can come up with answers but they are meaningless because unicorns do not exist.

## Framing The Question

So what is the meaning of even humanity in the face of a universe based in science and scientific laws? What meaning can it have? If human emotions are chemical reactions to external or genetic stimuli and things like love, or compassion, or joy, or wonder and awe are mere calculable, measurable and meaningless things, then what are we? Modern Cosmology has pulled humanity out of the center of the question and replaced us with the universe itself, or as the case may be the dimensional realm in which ours and many other universes may exist.

The assumption of modern thinking is that we live in a world totally different from the world that was written about by the Jews and in which Jesus lived and died. Structuralism and the like argue that the Church was the answer for the historical situation of the world in the last days of the pagan Roman Empire, but that now we face a different situation; that for true spirituality one must have a new, up-to-date, twentieth century solution to the problems which assail us. Modern biology and cosmology push it

away even from the question of history, which is still an anthropocentric approach, and place it billions of miles and years removed from us.

So if our first question was *'what is the nature of religion'* then the final question we pose in this exploration is *'what is the nature of science?'* Is science as was believed for so long, human exploration and questioning, life seeking answers or is it the more proper understanding of empirical observation and conclusions? What are facts? Does science give any better understanding of the universe than does the creation myth? Are we better off today than our ancestors in the knowledge department? Has the world become more closed in the last 200 years – more so than in all of the centuries before? That is to say, has our vision of humanity and life narrowed in its attempt to broaden our understanding?

In a sense then, all that can be said about the sacred already has been said. We do not need to seek new answers, as we might in medicine or physics, but take the answers we already have and apply them within our own situation, humanity as it exists today. For that reason, sacred thinking is often seen as backwards, superstitious, or ignorant, but at the same time all of our non-sacred thinking has not brought us peace or freedom from want either.

So where does it end? Is the Profane within Sacred or Sacred within Profane?

Science tells us, all elements, all combination of things, even all knowledge, are already contained within this universe, from its earliest moment to now in the same sense that all of the gold which will ever be produced on Earth already has been. If that is true, could it also be true about the human soul?

## Putting It All Together

As always the irony to this author seems to be that the ideas which religion produces, universal laws, anthropocentric reality, and the notion of the worth and value of the individual also give religion ground to its greatest opponents. But it is the nature of the thinking that provides the answer to the irony. It is how you see the problem which dictates the answer. When you begin by postulating God, then science is 'tainted' by that fact. Things can or cannot happen in terms of the Faith, not merely in terms of the empirical evidence. The fact that something works is secondary to the why it works, that is to say that the answer may be obscured by either the reliance upon the deity or the confusion of application of two separate ends to the same cause, which is not physical in nature. This is the fullness of the argument against medieval thinking.

Yeah, well to that end, just like theology was probably not the best field to postulate a scientific cosmology, then perhaps science is not the best discipline for determining meaning and purpose. Unless we are looking to the idea of appropriateness; science cannot truly 'answer' questions of morality or origin any more than Faith can answer specific questions about the biological or cosmological origin and motion (the specific interaction and results of physical objects). But as we saw with myth, as well as the entire history of science, the answer that each provides can give meaning and insight into the other, providing a rich human experience. Religion, like science, only loses relevance when we refuse to hear what it tells us about ourselves and the universe around us.

Today, there seems to be two camps: those who believe in the sacred and those who do not. But it is much more complex than that. Even among those camps there are those who believe or do not believe and those who want to believe; those who see no paradox in science and religion and those who are unable to bridge the two. There are cultural Christians and Jews as well as devout scientists. Sometimes it is easier to explain the cosmos than plumb the depths of the human soul.

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*"Because there are laws such as gravity, the Universe can and will create itself out of nothing. It is not necessary to invoke God to light the blue touch paper and set the Universe going."*

**Stephen Hawking, *The Grand Design***

*“Stephen Hawking to God: Your Services Are No Longer Needed; God to Hawking: You So Don't Get Who I Am”*

**Clay Ferris Naff, N**

*“It certainly may be easier to not believe in God, but is it necessarily better? I have seen no empirical or rational proof in anything else that has been produced in the mind of man.”*

**Anon**