

CHAPTER 44 : THE MODERN HUMANISTIC ERA

The general progress in Reformation that marked the era of Protestant Reformation went in reverse during the modern era of world history. As we shall see, the new era became characterized by increasing humanism and decreasing faith in the word of God. This in turn gave way to decreasing will to uphold the Ten Commandments. Heresies again began to multiply and increase. Many of the Protestant churches became lukewarm and doctrinally corrupted. And the Protestant nations became de-Protestantized and even de-Christianized. As false religion and false worship increased during the era, God gave up societies to judgment, just as He revealed in Romans 1. Sins like sodomy, adultery, and abortion abounded. Deadly revolutions, civil wars, and even world wars multiplied.

The causes of this deformation are largely owing to the intrigues and persecutions by the Romanist powers, the educational influence of the Jesuits, and the spiritual dullness and even apostasy of the Protestants. Too many protestants lacked the heart to uphold Biblical truth and enforce the Ten Commandments. They forgot that the very prosperity they enjoyed came by way of God's blessing for their earlier faithfulness to God's word. They began to conceive it was the result of their own native reason and skill, instead of God's grace. The Protestants therefore became easy prey for the Jesuits and other heretics, who offered philosophies contrary to scripture. The Protestant Reformation quickly gave way to the Enlightenment movement as the dominant intellectual force ordering societal conduct and civil policy.

The Enlightenment was a philosophical movement arising out of the 17th century which advocated a rational and scientific approach to religious, social, political, and economic issues, as opposed to an approach based upon divine revelation. As such, it promoted a secular view of the world and a general sense of progress and perfectibility. And it attacked religious authority, dogmatism, intolerance, censorship, and economic and social restraints. It sought to usher in an Age of Reason that it was believed would rid mankind of the ills it faced. It was thoroughly humanistic in its foundations, skeptical of the revealed religion of scripture. As the schoolmasters of Europe, the Jesuits were able to promote a form of humanism which eventually gave way to the secular humanism of the Enlightenment.

We have already seen how the Jesuit Order arose in the era of Protestant Reformation, from its founding by Ignatius Loyola. We also treated its methods and its ends. We noted how one of its aims, if not its preeminent aim, was the thwarting of established Protestantism. The Holy Roman Empire was declining and proving inadequate to stop the Protestant Reformation. So a new institution – one more equipped for the task – was needed by Rome. In stepped the Jesuit Order, led by its Superior General (sometimes referred to as “the Black Pope”), to fill these shoes. In the era of Protestant Reformation she began to enjoy remarkable success, and she continued her success into the modern era. Indeed, one important factor for the very rise of the age of secular humanism was the promotion of humanism by the Jesuits. Their influence was profound because of their leading role in education through their network of schools.

The establishment of schools as a means of outreach evolved and was not conceived at the inception of the Order. In 1547, scarcely a half-dozen years after the founding of the Society, Ignatius received an unexpected and unsolicited invitation from leading citizens of the city of Messina in Sicily to found and staff a secondary school for their sons. He accepted, and the school opened the next year.

That same year, thirty members of the senate in Palermo, impressed by what was happening in Messina, petitioned Ignatius for a similar school. Again he acquiesced. Other schools soon followed -- in 1551 schools opened in both Vienna and Rome. By the time Ignatius died in 1556, the Jesuits were operating some thirty schools, practically all of them secondary, and just a few years later Polanco would write in the name of the new general to inform Jesuits that education had become the primary ministry of the Society.

Meanwhile the school in Rome, the "Roman College," had developed into a university, and, while secondary schools would always be far more numerous, other institutions of higher learning would henceforth be an important part of the Jesuit enterprise. Within a century 300 Jesuit colleges dotted Catholic Europe in "one of the great extensions and consolidations of Renaissance humanism". By 1773, the Jesuits were operating more than eight hundred universities, seminaries, primary, and secondary schools around the globe. The world had never seen before, nor has it seen since, such an immense network of educational institutions operating on an international basis under a single aegis. Jesuits were called the schoolmasters of Europe during these centuries, not only because of their schools but also for their pre-eminence as scholars and for the thousands of textbooks they composed. Christopher Clavius, S.J., for example, whom Enlightenment philosophers Descartes and Leibniz acknowledged as a source of their inspiration, wrote a standard geometry text used throughout Europe.

Gerónimo Nadal, one of Ignatius's closest collaborators, was also the founder and first rector of the school in Messina. He drew up the curriculum along lines in accord with those promoted by Renaissance humanists, and this became, along with some of Nadal's other writings, the first, somewhat indistinct, blueprint for the schools that were springing up everywhere. A number of attempts were made in succeeding decades to come up with a comprehensive Jesuit plan of studies that could be used as a guide in all the Jesuit schools. It was Claudio Acquaviva who was able to bring this long-standing project to completion and officially publish in 1599 the *Ratio studiorum* that became the Magna Charta of Jesuit education. It included the humanities - literature, history, drama, etc. - as well as philosophy and theology. This meant that the Jesuit *Ratio* assumed that literary or humanistic subjects could be integrated into the study of professional or scientific subjects; that is, it assumed that the humanistic program of the Renaissance was compatible with the Scholastic program of the Middle Ages. Its basic premises were humanistic, and quite contrary to scriptural Protestant principles. Man's reason – and not God's word – was treated by the Jesuit *Ratio* as the ultimate fountain of knowledge.

The *Ratio* had impact far beyond Jesuit institutions, truly setting the educational standards for schools in Protestant and Catholic nations alike. It was seen as a proper statement of ideals, methods, and objectives shared broadly by educators in early modern

Europe. For the Society of Jesus, the *Ratio studiorum* symbolized a certain maturing in its commitment to education, which had great repercussions for the future of Roman Catholicism. The schools were often at the center of the culture of the towns and cities where they were located: typically, they would produce several plays or even ballets per year, and some maintained important astronomical observatories.

Perhaps most profoundly, it meant a special relationship to culture in that the Society as an institution had a systematic relationship to “secular” learning, for its members had to be prepared to teach both the classics of Latin and Greek literature of the humanistic tradition (Homer, Virgil, Cicero, and Terence, for example) and the scientific texts of Aristotle in the Scholastic tradition (we must remember that “philosophy” meant to a large extent “natural philosophy,” subjects we call biology, physics, and astronomy). If Jesuits were to teach these subjects, they would also almost perforce begin to write about them, at least to the point of producing textbooks for their students.

Ignatius Loyola had mentioned in the Jesuit Constitutions the possibility of “writing books useful for the common good.” Few such books were produced, however, until the number of schools began to grow and the need for appropriate and inexpensive textbooks felt. With textbooks in view, Ignatius in the last year of his life went to immense trouble to secure a good press for the Roman College, which was installed and in good working order within a few months of his death. Among the first books published by this first press operated by the Jesuits was André des Freux’s edition of Martial’s *Epigrams* (1558) - a book tellingly by a pagan. Within two generations, Jesuits were producing books on a great scale, a phenomenon that would come to characterize the order. Many of these were textbooks or at least related directly to instruction in the Jesuit classrooms, but others ranged far more broadly and began to touch on almost every imaginable subject. The experience of the Jesuit missionaries in exotic places like Japan, China, and Viet Nam gave, when viewed largely, an extraordinarily cosmopolitan cast to this production.

It is highly probable that even without the schools, the Jesuits would have produced a significant number of books, for their counterparts in other religious orders did so. However that may be, the incontrovertible fact is that the schools provided the impetus for an extraordinarily copious production. They also required that the scope of that production be consistently and predictably wide-ranging, for the schools took the Jesuits into just about every conceivable aspect of human culture and made them reflect upon it and come up with something to say. That they did, and their humanistic influence penetrated the world over.

Jesuits in the Protestant nations tended to promote religious toleration and secularism, while those in the Roman Catholic nations tended to urge the maintenance of Roman Catholic Church privileges and suppression of religious dissent. The reasons for this variance are not hard to discern. In both cases the Jesuit Order pursued a policy which was in the best political interest of the Roman Catholic Church and the Jesuit Order, even though the Order’s philosophical position was not consistent across national lines. In the Roman Catholic nations the Jesuits promoted Renaissance humanism, whereas the Jesuits

in the Protestant nations tended to promote secular humanism as a means to wean the nation away from established Protestantism.

In the Protestant nations an informal coalition evolved of Roman Catholics, Anabaptists, Enlightenment intellectuals, Jews, and other heretical factions in favor of religious toleration and secularism. They did not want to be disadvantaged by the established Protestant religion. Even within the established Protestant churches in the Protestant nations, Enlightenment ideas eventually became popular. As a consequence, “Protestantism” – at least in political terms – became synonymous with religious toleration, in contrast to the suppression of religious dissent which persisted in Roman Catholic nations.

“Protestantism” thereby gradually lost its original meaning among the self-professed Protestants. In the Reformation era, Protestantism had meant structuring and ordering everything in accordance with God’s word. The Bible was treated as the foundation of all knowledge, which it is. This had meant the Ten Commandments were to be upheld by the state, and religious falsehood was to be suppressed. The confessions of the Reformation era uniformly upheld the Establishment Principle. They also upheld such Protestant distinctives as the doctrines of grace. But as “Protestants” abandoned true Protestantism, the very term “Protestant” began to take on new meanings in the minds of men. Even Arminians – whose doctrine of salvation was actually closer to that of the Roman Catholic Church than that of historic Protestantism – became identified with Protestantism. “Protestantism” so called (albeit not the true Protestantism of the Reformation era) swelled with all manner of heretics- from Arminian Methodists to Unitarian Congregationalists to Baptist separatists. As the number of heresies and heretics abounded in the Protestant nations, the movement towards pluralism, tolerationism, and secularism became all the greater.

Freemasonry developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a means to forward the aspirations of the Enlightenment. People of all religious faiths were invited into Masonic lodges as lodge “brothers”. Their vision was of a secular state where people of all religious creeds could be treated equally. They idealized a brotherhood of man, unbroken by religious distinctions.

The Roman Catholic Church and the Jesuit Order only objected to the Enlightenment movement when its effects reverberated to the Roman Catholic nations and Roman Catholic Church privileges became threatened. Roman (or Renaissance) humanism was quite acceptable in the Roman Catholic Church, but secular humanism’s inroads into Roman Catholic nations threatened Roman Catholic interests and privileges. Indeed, within the Roman Catholic Church, the Jesuit Order had perhaps the most to lose by an adoption of secular humanism in the Roman Catholic nations. The war against secular humanism by the Roman Catholic Church included a ban in the eighteenth century on Roman Catholic participation in freemasonry.

It is no exaggeration to assert that the Jesuit Order hatched the Enlightenment movement which effectively overturned established Protestantism.

Paving the way for the Enlightenment was a French-born philosopher named Descartes (1596-1650). Descartes sought to prove how, starting from a position of universal doubt, he could through reason arrive at a system of truth. This methodology has earned him the title of the 'father of modern philosophy.' This methodology directly contradicted the historic reformed, Biblical view of theologians like Augustine and Calvin whose methodology was instead: 'I believe in order that I may know' (or as worded in scripture, 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'). Reformed Christianity stresses man's inability to attain true knowledge about the fundamental nature of God and man apart from divine revelation, due to man's sinful corruption. Not surprisingly, Descartes rejected this reformed principle, for he was a devout Roman Catholic, educated in the Jesuit College at La Flèche and the University of Poitiers. He was a product of the Jesuit *Ratio studiorum*. Descartes had significant influence even in Protestant countries, residing much of his life in Holland and the end of his life in Sweden. Descartes' credibility was certainly enhanced by his significant achievements in mathematics and science.

The German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz profoundly stimulated the Enlightenment movement in Germany. Leibniz was born in Leipzig in 1646. Of Lutheran background, he ended his life as a thorough-going humanistic rationalist. Leibniz was the greatest polymath of modern philosophers, making contributions to mathematics, jurisprudence, and history, as well as philosophy. He discovered differential calculus and pioneered symbolic logic. He worked on among other things hydraulic presses, windmills, lamps, submarines, clocks, carriages and waterpumps. He traveled extensively, and corresponded with the leading humanists of his day. He was the founder of the academy of Berlin. He wrote books on his rationalistic philosophy. These works influenced Christian von Wolff, whose popularization of the Leibnizian system became the standard academic philosophy in 18th century Germany.

The philosopher who arguably most popularized the Enlightenment among the English-speaking peoples was John Locke (1632-1704). Locke was greatly influenced by the humanistic philosophy of Descartes. Locke argued that people had the gift of reason, or the ability to think. In the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke proposed that the mind is born blank, a *tabula rasa* upon which the world describes itself through the experience of the five senses. Knowledge arising from sensation is perfected by reflection, thus enabling humans to arrive at such ideas as space, time, and infinity.

Based upon man's presumed native ability to reason, Locke thought men had the natural ability to govern themselves and to look after the well being of society. He wrote, "The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it, which [treats] everyone [equally]. Reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind... that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health or possessions." Locke did not believe that God had chosen a group or family of people to rule countries. He rejected the Divine Right of Kings, which many kings and queens used to justify their right to rule. Instead, he argued

that governments should only operate with the consent of the people they are governing. In this way, Locke supported democracy as a form of government. Locke wrote, “[We have learned from] history we have reason to conclude that all peaceful beginnings of government have been laid in the consent of the people.” Governments were formed, according to Locke, to protect the right to life, the right to freedom, and the right to property. Their rights were absolute, belonging to all the people. Locke also believed that government power should be divided equally into three branches of government so that politicians will not face the “temptation... to grasp at [absolute] power.” If any government abused these rights instead of protecting them, then the people had the right to rebel and form a new government.

John Locke spoke out against the control of any man against his will. This control was acceptable neither in the form of an unfair government, nor in slavery. Locke wrote, “The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but only have the law of nature for his rule.” Consonant with this opinion, Locke asserted in “A Letter Concerning Toleration” that “the toleration of those that differ from others in matters of religion is so agreeable to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to the genuine reason of mankind, that it seems monstrous for men to be so blind as not to perceive the necessity and advantage of it in so clear a light.”

Enlightenment thought struck at the heart of historic reformed doctrine. Historic reformed doctrine urged the suppression of false religion and false worship by the magistrate, and it rejected popular political revolution. As John Calvin wrote:

"This feeling of reverence, and even of piety, we owe to the utmost to all our rulers, be their characters what they may. This I repeat the oftener, that we may learn not to consider the individuals themselves, but hold it to be enough that by the will of the Lord they sustain a character on which he has impressed and engraven inviolable majesty. But rulers, you will say, owe mutual duties to those under them. This I have already confessed. But if from this you conclude that obedience is to be returned to none but just governors, you reason absurdly. Husbands are bound by mutual duties to their wives, and parents to their children. Should husbands and parents neglect their duty; should the latter be harsh and severe to the children whom they are enjoined not to provoke to anger, and by their severity harass them beyond measure; should the former treat with the greatest contumely the wives whom they are enjoined to love and to spare as the weaker vessels; would children be less bound in duty to their parents, and wives to their husbands? They are made subject to the froward and undutiful. Nay, since the duty of all is not to look behind them, that is, not to inquire into the duties of one another, but to submit each to his own duty, this ought especially to be exemplified in the case of those who are placed under the power of others. Wherefore, if we are cruelly tormented by a savage, if we are rapaciously pillaged by an avaricious or luxurious, if we are neglected by a sluggish, if, in short, we are persecuted for righteousness' sake by an impious and sacrilegious prince, let us first call up the remembrance of our faults, which doubtless the Lord is chastising by such scourges. In this way humility will curb our impatience. And let us reflect that it belongs not to us to cure these evils, that all that remains for us is to implore the help of the Lord, in whose hands are the hearts of kings, and inclinations of kingdoms.⁶⁵ “God

standeth in the congregation of the mighty; he judgeth among the gods.” Before his face shall fall and be crushed all kings and judges of the earth, who have not kissed his anointed, who have enacted unjust laws to oppress the poor in judgment, and do violence to the cause of the humble, to make widows a prey, and plunder the fatherless...But in that obedience which we hold to be due to the commands of rulers, we must always make the exception, nay, must be particularly careful that it is not incompatible with obedience to Him to whose will the wishes of all kings should be subject, to whose decrees their commands must yield, to whose majesty their sceptres must bow.”

John Locke was actually well read in the works of the Jesuit Bellarmine, but since Catholicism was such a social taboo at the time in England, he never openly admitted to it. A careful reading of Locke’s *Second Treaties on Government* reveals the striking similarities between Bellarmine and Locke. Bellarmine, like Locke after him, argued for popular sovereignty as follows: “Political power resides immediately in the whole multitude as in an organic unit. The Divine law has not given it to any particular man; therefore, it has given it to the multitude.” Both could then urge the natural right of popular revolution against a ruler, since both held legitimate government depends upon the consent of the governed. In contrast, Calvin advocated the responsibility of subordinate magistrates to protect the rights of God and men, but rejected popular revolution.

The Enlightenment philosophies of Descartes, Leibniz, Locke and others, which really had their foundational origins in Jesuit philosophy, undermined and eventually overwhelmed the Biblical faith in the West. It would take time for the Enlightenment ideals to take root in the constitutions of nations, but once it did, the formerly Protestant states became dominated by secular humanism.

Yet, not all the blessings of the Protestant Reformation were lost in this new era, any more than all the curses of Romanism were lost during the era of Protestant Reformation. The Protestant Reformation helped usher in great industrial and technological revolutions, beginning in the Protestant nations. The products of these technological innovations have consisted not only of weapons of destruction, but also tools for disseminating knowledge, including knowledge of the Bible. The wider distribution of the Bible has thus marked the modern era. The Bible and reformed literature about the Bible has become available in almost every corner of the earth, as communication and transportation have improved. This access to the truth has paved the way for a future Reformation even grander in scope than the Protestant Reformation. But it has also meant mankind is more culpable for refusing to implement scriptural truth in our modern era, with ignorance less an excuse than it was in previous ages.

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CHAPTER 44 : THE MODERN HUMANISTIC ERA

This second volume in a two-part series on church history is primarily an edited version of the following works on church history and Biblical interpretation:

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Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Logos Research Systems, Inc.: Oak Harbor, WA, 1997). (see electronic version at <http://www.ccel.org/s/schaff/history/About.htm>)

J. Parnell McCarter, *Sabbath Bible Survey Tests and Assignments* (PHSC: Grand Rapids, MI, 2003). (see electronic version at <http://www.puritans.net/curriculum/>)

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The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all church histories should be based.

Other references especially consulted for this chapter include:

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