

EPISODE 19

THE REFORMuLATION

Hi there. Welcome to the end of the world. My name is Michael Folz. And this is Episode number 19 of my podcast Dial It Back Or Die. Now last time I went over how the so-called Renaissance was primarily a fiction created in the mid 19th Century, and is a fiction that has been pushed on us ever since. Today we're going to go over everything that's wrong about what you probably think you know about the Reformation. Because, in fact, the real story of what transpired is almost as bizarre as the story behind Jeremy Bentham and the development of liberal democracy. (And, once again, this episode is going to be a little longer than usual.)

Now a major theme of this podcast is that the period of the Enlightenment in the late 18th Century was the critical point where the West went wrong. But a strong argument can also be made that this wrong turn actually happened at the time of the Reformation in the early 16th Century. Certainly the first event almost inevitably led into the second.

So let's start with the common historical narrative about those critical changes that took place around the year 1520.

Here goes:

By the turn of the 16th Century the Catholic Church was in what appeared to be terminal decline. As mentioned briefly in the last chapter, the office of the pope had degenerated into nothing more than a place occupied by various worldly, luxury loving members of various warlord families like the Borgias and the Medicis. (For instance, The evil Cesare Borgia was the bastard offspring of Pope Alexander VI—aka Roderic Borgia—and his mistress. And Cesare himself was also briefly an archbishop.) Further afield the Church's integrity had been corrupted by the sale of church offices (which is called simony) and the sale of indulgences (which supposedly let people buy their way out of Purgatory). Not to mention the Spanish Inquisition.

In short, it was a rotten tree ready to fall over.

Then in 1517 a brave young monk named Martin Luther attached his 95 Theses of protest to a

church in Wittenburg, Germany. In no time at all protest changed to full blown revolution, and in three short years, in an early display of people power, a whole new take on Christianity had been born. And this was a take that did away with superstition and one that acclaimed both the worth of the individual and the centrality of rationality.

Now, again, that's the common historical narrative.

But, just as the discovery of the Little Ice Age led to a new understanding as to how and why the High Middle Ages collapsed, nowadays we know that the common narrative about the Reformation isn't the real story. Because, having just experienced the birth of the internet in the present day, it is now pretty clear that what was really going on back then was technological disruption.

So some background: You may already know that some of our most important inventions—gunpowder, the compass, paper—actually originated in China. As mentioned in Episode 16, however, in most instances the Chinese had never really refined or improved any of those inventions. Whereas once said inventions arrived in the West busy minds and hands almost immediately took over. For example, gunpowder had only been used for fireworks in China. It was in the West that people recognized its true potential to so efficiently kill other people. Likewise, although China had been content to stay within itself, Western explorers immediately started utilizing the compass in order to discover the rest of the world. And it was Europeans who figured out how to produce paper in large quantities.

(And note once again that this intense attitude of improvement and innovation was native to the West long before any Renaissance or Enlightenment or any other made up era.)

And why did people need all that paper? You'll recall that in the episode about Christianity I pointed out that there was a several century gap between the Old and the New Testament. And that this makes us tend to think that the time of Jesus was just a continuation of the time of David. Well, it's a similar situation when it comes to books. We are told about how monks in the Dark Ages would spend months and months copying one book. Then we are told about the invention of the printing press around the year 1450. So we assume that in 1449 the only books available were those beautiful, heavy (and extremely expensive) illuminated manuscripts.

But those monks had been performing a labor of love and devotion 600 years earlier. And the religious books that they were copying were considered to be sacred, almost magical works of art. When the High Middle Ages took hold, however, and all those universities were founded, there was a

need for, as it were, textbooks. So one of the most important industries of the era became book copying, with factories of up to a hundred scribes furiously writing away as quickly and as neatly as possible. Students back then were characteristically poor. But the books produced by the scribes were inexpensive enough so that three or four students could chip in, buy their course book, and then share it.

Nonetheless Johannes Gutenberg's invention of movable type, was, as we say now, a real game changer. Perhaps one of the greatest technological changes ever.

And here the West's innovating spirit was helped along by our use of an alphabet. After all, China and Korea had been using woodblock printing for hundreds of years. But their invention of movable type well before Gutenberg really didn't speed things up for them all that much, since they used over 8,000 different and distinct ideograms in their writing.

Movable type was so incredibly efficient for languages with alphabets, however, that once Gutenberg figured out what metals to use for the type, how to adapt pressing machines for printing, etc., the idea took off like wildfire. Now not only could single students afford books, but even peasants could buy simple pamphlets. The proliferation of books meant that many more people were motivated to become literate. And the fact that most of these new readers didn't understand Latin meant that more and more books were now published in the local languages. For better or worse, this much wider audience also meant that now works were being produced that weren't just narrowly religious or philosophical in nature. From now on reading wouldn't simply be for scholars. From now on it would become a principle source of entertainment.

And now let's briefly consider the actual state of the Church around 1500.

As I pointed out earlier, when we look back in hindsight we can always find so-called 'reasons' to explain what then happened. And it is extremely seductive to do so when our present ideology is, so to speak, guiding the hunt through those various threads of the past.

The simple reality, though, is that nobody in any part of Europe at the turn of the 16th Century would have predicted the possibility of any sort of major schism. Yes, I know that John Wycliffe and the Lollards had agitated for quasi-Protestant ideas in England in the late 14th Century. And that the Hussites had led a similar movement in the Czech area in the 1420s. But these sorts of movements had always come and gone *within* the Church, and even at their strongest they only held the interest of a tiny percentage of Christianity.

It's also true—as the last episode laid bare—that Italy at this time was hardly a good example of Christian morality, and that the papacy was going through one of its more degenerate stages. But that Borgia pope Alexander VI, for instance, was actually a pretty decent administrator. And the Church was much, much more than just the central authorities in Rome. Moreover, as had always happened in the past, there were already various reform movements which were working to reinvigorate matters from the ground up.

If anything one could argue that in the year 1500 the foundations of the Church were as strong and deep rooted as they had ever been, especially in terms of devotion, pilgrimages, religious bequests, etc. And if there were one person who most exemplified a positive vision of the Church moving forward into the future, it would no doubt be the Dutch scholar known as Erasmus.

Born 14 years after Leonardo, and dying 19 years after him, the life of Erasmus serves as an interesting counterpoint to that of da Vinci. Because whereas Leonardo was conspicuously negligent in his pursuit of prayer or faith, and also didn't seem to lead a particularly happy life, Erasmus was a content person, well regarded by all, who honestly strove to use his reason to clear away the fog and superstition which had grown up around religious belief. Da Vinci was a vegetarian who said that he was against war. But he also delighted in trying to invent new means of mass destruction, and, as I pointed out in the last episode, he spent most of his life trying to get those totally immoral Italian warlords to use them. What's more, he also intensely thought that the vast majority of his fellow humans were little more than copulating animals. On the other hand, Erasmus was a pacifist who actually walked the walk.

And the humanism which Erasmus taught was not in the slightest bit a rejection of God or even Christian belief. Rather it was a positive affirmation that there was a divine spark in each one of us, and that it is our Christian duty to maintain and encourage that spark so as to glorify the Lord. To that end he re-translated the entire Bible, and sought to separate various Church practices, like the selling of those indulgences, from the actual specific teachings of Jesus. He also wrote any number of non-explicitly religious works. And he was extremely popular with readers. Even during the Reformation, in the 1530s, it is estimated that perhaps 20% of all books in print were by him. Which shows that his vision of peace and religiously centered progress resonated across a wide spectrum.

Even today I suspect that many Bible hating atheists would find much to admire in the man and his teachings. And few would find fault with a Church that had reformed its bad habits and then proceeded down the road that Erasmus had shown.

But we can look around us today and know that of course this didn't happen.

And you would be hard pressed to guess beforehand what actually did happen. Because it all started with a variation on that perennial primordial question which people sitting around in Freshman dorms love to debate: Do we have free will or is everything predetermined? Or, to put it in Christian terms: Do we actively choose to follow Jesus' example of righteousness and good deeds, or is salvation purely a matter of divine Grace?

Now a sophisticated student of philosophy could no doubt point out that an answer to this question could readily contain elements of both points of view. For instance, what would be genuine free will in the present could simultaneously appear to be predetermined when looked at from the vantage point of eternity.

Such a formulation, however, would call for a semblance of subtlety.

But this subtlety would not necessarily be found in a straightforward reading of the Bible. Because in reality the Scriptures had never been intended to be some sort of unitary whole. The Old Testament was an amalgamation of decidedly pre-Christian Hebrew texts. The New Testament was primarily four different Gospels written quite a few years after the fact, plus a collection of letters from Paul, which it is pretty clear from their context were decidedly his personal opinions and not meant to be quote/unquote 'scripture'. It is little wonder then that up until the invention of the printing press the Church had tried to keep the Bible away from the masses. Not to shield them from the 'truth'. But rather to shield them from all the contradictions that this haphazardly collected book seemed to present to the uninitiated.

This, by the way, was also the rationale for why Rome and the papacy were so central to Western Christendom. What with all the mental twists and turns one had to make to square each part of the Bible with the other, and then with the further Medieval need to have Christian and Aristotelian morals line up together, it is easy to see why the Church was so hyper-sensitive to heretical thought. It also helps explain why the Church, and not the Bible, was Christianity's central authority.

Although in a certain sense it didn't even matter *what* the Church had decided was Gospel truth, but rather *that* the Church had decided on a certain framework. After all, the ultimate point of Christianity was to get people to *act* Christian, not to argue about annoying theological exactitudes.

At any rate, around the year 1515 a German Augustinian monk named Martin Luther had been carefully reading Paul's letter to the Romans, which does go on and on about the necessity for God's

grace. And he expanded upon a theory from a thousand years earlier which had been made by St. Augustine, who was one of early Christianity's most influential thinkers. And this was that indeed there was no such thing as free will, and that we miserable abject sinners therefore could only be saved through Grace alone.

Now it was a pure coincidence that around this same time the current pope, Leo X, wanted to get serious about finally completing Rome's long unfinished giant cathedral, St. Peter's. And to do this he had encouraged the selling of indulgences, which—again—were gifts given to the church in order to lessen the almost inevitable amount of time one had to spend in Purgatory after death. Although this wasn't quite as sleazy a tactic as is commonly supposed, since for it to work the buyers had to also humbly confess all of their sins and then vow to lead blameless lives from then on. But it is easy to see how the ignorant could be persuaded that they were in effect buying their way into Heaven, and also how a sincere monk could become righteously indignant at the perceived tacky (and non Biblically ordained) behavior of the Church that he held so dear.

So in October of 1517 Martin Luther, who at the time was one of the more respected minds in the German Church, let it be known that he wanted to have an open philosophical debate about, primarily, these two issues of indulgences and of salvation through Grace. In and of itself this was of no great consequence, since at the time scholastic debate was a favorite pastime, both outside the Church and within it. But it just so happened that Luther had a pretty strong temper and a pretty big ego. And so did the chief Dominican friar who happened to be in Germany selling those indulgences.

Then add to this the insanely complicated politics which surrounded the various electors of the Holy Roman Empire. Politics which had become inextricably entwined with the politics of Italy and the papacy. Which at this moment just happened to be centered on the particular elector who was also the ruler of Wittenburg, the place where Martin Luther lived. Now this elector could have cared less about theological disputes. But he could readily see that this fast spiraling argument between Luther and the indulgence salesman could serve his purposes in the three dimensional chess game that he was playing against Rome.

Needless to say, all of this mixed together into quite the imbroglio. But it was also at this point essentially a small and meaningless one. And in most circumstances it would have run its course in due time and would have been forgotten to history.

Except... for the existence of the printing press. Because although Gutenberg had never made any money off of his invention, a lot of other people did. And although the first printing projects in

1450 were for runs of maybe a couple of hundred books, by 1517 it was common to be printing hundreds of thousands of cheap pamphlets. And, precisely because belief in Christianity was so strong, this rather arcane debate about free will versus grace, which would have bothered the minds of only a few relevant monks a hundred years earlier, was now published, printed, distributed, and argued over in every town, and most houses, in the German speaking world.

In effect Martin Luther now became history's first media sensation. And like most media sensations who have been created since then, all that attention went to his head. Because whereas when all this started in 1517 he was genuinely a humble monk respectfully disagreeing with his superior, the Pope, in three short years, by 1520, he had firmly decided that not only was this particular pope evil, but that the entire institution of the papacy was the Anti-Christ itself. The work of and the actual embodiment of the Devil. Seriously. He also decided that these were the End Times, and that he was the prophet sent by God in order to gather together the Elect. You know, those few humans out there that his reading of the Book of Romans had determined that God had predetermined to be saved.

You can imagine how profitable it was for those printers to keep churning out pamphlets promoting these outrageous ideas. Then also printing rebuttals. And so forth and so on.

(And, as a side note, one of the big reasons why Luther's now millions of readers could believe that Rome had indeed turned into the Whore of Babylon was precisely because of the rest of Europe's revulsion for the moral depravity which they perceived was then taking place in Italy. In other words, this is further evidence that what we presently call the Renaissance was actually seen at the time as literally Hell on Earth.)

Back to Luther, though. Because by declaring that the entire superstructure of the Church was actually controlled by Satan, this meant that to Luther the *only* source materials for the Christian faith were now in the Bible. Unfortunately, said Bible had probably more passages suggesting free will and the need to actively show one's faith than it did supporting the 'grace' argument. And remember that Paul in his writings had repeatedly stated that the thoughts expressed were his own, personal, imperfect thoughts.

But for Luther, now convinced that he was God's personal representative on Earth, this posed little problem. First he just got rid of certain books (which are now called the Apocrypha, and which are still included in the Catholic Bible). Then he created his own Biblical translation, in which he emphasized the parts he wanted to emphasize, and played down the parts which he didn't like.

Thus the Reformation.

All of which would have been bad enough if Luther had then at least been consistent with his insistence that this new Church would only accept practices specifically mentioned in the Bible. But he didn't. Because Luther really liked the doctrine of the Eucharist, which—without any Biblical justification—held that the wine and bread given at communion actually *became* the flesh and blood of Jesus. He also loved religious paintings and statues, even though no less a source than the Ten Commandments themselves forbid worshipping 'graven images'.

Finally, there was the issue of infant baptism. Not only had all the baptisms listed in the Bible been of adults, but the very concept of baptism was that it was a result of someone having consciously accepted Jesus' teachings. However, back in the 4th Century, when the Church in effect had become the official religion of Rome, the deal that was struck was that from now on each and every citizen by definition would be Christian. Hence the necessity of baptizing each soul as soon as humanly possible. Once again, however, Luther didn't even begin to touch or question this practice.

And, as the entire world of German culture convulsed around him, he couldn't stop himself from continuing to write and publish book after book concerning his ideas. Which only served to point out the absurd hypocrisy of his whole enterprise. Because his original argument had been that each and every believer, not some high and mighty pope, should be free to figure out the Scriptures on their own. In the privacy of their home and to the satisfaction of their mind and heart. But it now became obvious that Luther himself was far more intolerant of the Biblical interpretations of others than the Church had ever been of his.

Because once the Pandora's Box of alternative interpretations of Scripture had been opened, there were any number of discontented clergy and lay people who were convinced that *they* in fact were the ones with all the proper insights. When you think about it—given the ambiguities and ad hoc nature of the Bible—it would seem obvious that opinions would end up all over the place. And how insane was it to declare that each and every man on the street, as it were, should or could have the inclination or ability to hold forth on theological subtleties? Most of us in the real world leave much simpler pursuits such as plumbing or electrical wiring to those who are better trained than we are. How many of us are mentally equipped to discuss epistemology? Eschatology? Ontology? Again, when the main purpose of organized religion had always been to get people to *behave* well. Not to argue effectively.

Further, there's a good reason why we don't have students grading their own exams. There's a good reason we have that saying about foxes guarding hen houses. Because most of us like to see

ourselves in the best possible light. So that it is therefore the rare individual who would interpret Scripture to their own disadvantage.

Although all the same I don't mean to totally impugn the motives of everyone who would get involved in the religious intolerance of the next hundred years or so. Because from the sternest of the Puritans to the most rabid of the Counter-Reformation Catholics, there was most definitely sincerity in the beliefs believed. Even Martin Luther was absolutely convinced that he was doing God's work.

Unfortunately, however, historically some of the most sincere people have also turned out to be the strongest of fanatics.

But back to the 1520s. For it is certainly true that the revolution wouldn't have happened without the printing press. For instance, it is estimated that by 1525 there were over 390 different editions of Luther's books in Germany alone. Along with at least three million other religious pamphlets in circulation. Because it also just so happened that, what with the rise of the infidel Ottoman Turks taking over Southeastern Europe, and what with the perceived depravity going on down in Italy, the good people of Northern Europe had already been at a fever pitch regarding a possible Second Coming. And now this sudden declaration that virtually everything that they had been taught to believe in—the mass, tithing, monasteries, friars, priests—was really some sort of outright fraud couldn't help but pull the rug out from everyone everywhere. Somewhat as the 1960s were in the United States, it was both highly liberating and highly disturbing.

The semi-independent cantons of Switzerland would now turn out to be hotbeds of religious upheaval. Only here the revolutionaries saw no need to go along with Luther's strange attachments to non-Biblical dogma. (Except of course for baptism.) In no time their churches would be stripped of paintings, often stripped of music, and stripped of Latin and incense and virtually everything else which had given the Catholic church any sense of emotional devotion. And much of this would finally coalesce in Geneva in the 1540s around a humorless French prig named John Calvin.

He would take Luther's idea of the Elect and take it one step further. Now it didn't matter how loving or devoted to God you were. It didn't matter how much you helped the poor or taught the ignorant. God had come up with a list of those to be saved even before He created the Earth, and if you weren't one of the less than 1% of humanity on that list, then tough nougies. By 1553 Calvin oversaw the persecution and burning at the stake (using green wood so that it would take longer) of Michael Servetus, a theologian who had disagreed with him. Two years later he beheaded his political opponents and now became dictator of Geneva. No music or dancing anywhere in the city from then

on out.

Not to be outdone, the Catholic Church had to fight back with its Counter-Reformation. And this is when that Spanish Inquisition was revved up. On the positive side, though, the Church did stop selling indulgences. It celebrated mysticism and devotion. It also doubled down on music and art in churches, on the Sacraments, on confession, and on all of its other traditions, including the veneration of Mary. Needless to say, however, the schism between it and the Lutherans and the Calvinists was complete.

But back again to the 1520s. Because right from the outset of the Reformation things had started to get ugly everywhere. In 1524-25 a Peasant's Revolt, the largest in Europe before the French Revolution, was brutally put down, with Martin Luther sadistically cheering on the Imperial troops. In 1533 King Henry VIII of England—originally the strongest European defender of Catholicism—changed his mind when the Church actually behaved morally and refused to grant him a marriage annulment which he didn't warrant. This destroyed an incredibly vibrant and living English Church, put most of its wealth in Henry's pockets and those of his cronies, and forever shaped our White Anglo-Saxon Protestant understanding of events.

And then there were the Anabaptists.

As with the Cathars three centuries earlier the victors ended up writing the history. So it is difficult to know for certain how pure or noble the Anabaptists actually were. But at least some of the people who put aside the old Church practices and tried to understand their Bibles in a new light saw the Commandment which said Thou Shalt Not Kill, and they read the places where Jesus said not to swear oaths. And they then concluded that all of civil society as presently constituted was therefore intrinsically un-Christian. They also concluded that if these were indeed the End Times, then time should end by true Christians showering the world with *agape*, that divine higher brotherly and sisterly love which Paul had also spent a lot of time writing about. And they decided that they would live this higher Christian life by stopping the hypocrisy of infant baptism, and by undergoing the same adult baptism which Jesus and John the Baptist and all the other early Christians had done.

At least now there was something that the Catholics and the Lutherans and the Reformed Protestants could all agree on: The Anabaptists must be destroyed. And so they were, wherever they were found. And then some of them, believing that their utopian ends justified whatever means, got violent in response. Which provoked even more fear and violence. In the end thousands of them,

egged on by charismatic pseudo-Messiahs, swarmed into the northern German city of Munster, where for eighteen months in 1534-5 they were surrounded by armies, starved into submission, and then horribly tortured and killed.

And I could go on and on. And for the next century the wars did go on and on, viciously, in bewildering complexity and detail, with friends and neighbors and entire countries torn apart. It all finally culminated in 1618 with the Thirty Years War, which raged for almost all of those thirty years from Amsterdam to Prague. And how bad was it? Well, it is estimated that at the war's end German speaking lands had lost over 30% of their population. And that's the average. In some places it was down 75%. Nor were women and children spared, what with rape and pillage and famine caused by all those marauding armies marching back and forth across Europe. In fact, up until the 20th Century this was probably the ugliest, most devastating war that Europe had seen in the entire Millennium.

So that this, then, was the true heritage of the Reformation. Bitterness, death, and destruction. All for the sake of Martin Luther's ego.

And what can we learn from all of this?

First of all, that this first sweeping technological revolution of putting a whole lot more information in front of a whole lot more eyeballs didn't result in anyone getting any wiser. Or even smarter. Martin Luther may have had a sharp mind, but his understanding of Jesus's teachings ended up being really stupid. After all, just reading the Gospels through once or twice makes it clear that, although Jesus does make several mentions of God's grace, the vast majority of his sayings and parables deal with the necessity of human agency: The need to be righteous, the duty to share with and to help others, the duty to invest one's talents. And if Jesus had meant his ministry to deal solely with our miserable sinfulness and the fact that only an elect few could look forward to Heaven anyway, it shouldn't take a doctorate in anything to figure out that he would have come right out and said that.

And this doesn't even touch the craziness that the doctrine of Predestination engendered. After all, if the list of the Elect had been drawn up even before Genesis, then God's sending of the savior Jesus Christ had all been nothing but some kind of sick joke.

But this leads us to the much larger issue about the meaning of the Reformation. Because it most emphatically did not offer up a more positive, humane, compassionate vision of the human condition. Quite the reverse. Martin Luther took St. Augustine's thousand year old incredibly negative view of original sin and mankind's supposed complete inability to rise above that. And then he made it

worse. And Luther seems warm and cuddly when compared to the later so-called 'Reforms' of John Calvin.

Then there are the side effects, as it were. I've already mentioned that, although the Church had always considered the Scriptures to be sacred and meaningful, because they so clearly contradicted themselves so much, the Church had never offered them up as any kind of ultimate authority. By denying the authority of the Church and tradition, however, the Protestants did indeed declare the Bible to be the ultimate authority. Inerrant. Which made a mockery of plain common sense. And incidentally also set up a totally unnecessary wedge between science and religion that we are still dealing with today.

(By the way, if you think that you know the story about the conflict between Galileo and the Church, here is what really happened: By the time that the Church launched its Counter-Reformation in the mid 16th Century the Protestant attitude regarding Scripture had become the dominant one. So now the Church felt the need to dumb itself down and to also declare the Bible to be inerrant. (To compare, think in the present day about how when one presidential candidate wears a flag lapel or stands in front of seventeen flags, then every other candidate also feels the need to.) Anyway, you'll recall how the popes had actively encouraged science, and how Clement VII had been intrigued by the priest Copernicus' theory. Now, however, the Vatican instituted a 'Don't ask, Don't tell' policy regarding any science which contradicted the Bible. Galileo was in fact a devout believer his entire life. And he actually encouraged both of his daughters to become nuns. But he was also an insufferably arrogant egotist who argued with and belittled everyone who disagreed with him. Now when the man who would become Pope Urban VIII had in his previous life been an urbane, educated cardinal, he had been one of Galileo's best friends and defenders. So what does Galileo do? He writes a book wherein he has this character who is literally named Simpleton who then parrots all of his old friend's (and now the Pope's) theories about science.

So that the ensuing trial was not about theology versus science, but rather about somebody needlessly and stupidly offending somebody else who was a lot more powerful than himself. And, after conviction, Galileo never spent time in jail, only in extremely comfortable house arrest, where visitors were always allowed to visit. But the final irony here is that Galileo's specific ideas about the heliocentric theory were actually wrong. Because, just like the other leading minds of his era, Galileo just could never accept the fact that the planets traveled around in ellipses, and not in his beloved circles.)

But back to other long term effects of the Reformation. Now, as previously mentioned, polytheistic religions had always included some goddesses along with their gods. The feminine principle, as it were. To the Egyptians a man's wife was co-equal to him. Further afield, as noted earlier, Eastern philosophy is well known for its yin/yang symbol, a shorthand for the understanding that masculine and feminine principles need to co-exist equally.

Judaism's God, on the other hand, was exclusively masculine. Nor did the Greeks and Romans, what with their homoerotic art, militarism, and endless wars, in practice exactly enshrine the feminine. In fact, you'll recall that the Romans initially thought Christianity pathetic precisely because its teachings stressed compassion, mercy, humility. All traditionally feminine traits.

So, given that a good Christian was indeed supposed to act quote/unquote 'feminine', it's therefore probably not surprising that the practice of worshiping and praying to Mary, the mother of Jesus, should have become such a predominant part of the Medieval Church. Such veneration seems to have arisen spontaneously, and it was a neat way for a supposedly strictly monotheistic religion to also formally recognize and include the female half of the human race.

But, outside of the Nativity, Mary is hardly mentioned in the Gospels. And Paul doesn't mention her at all. So, needless to say, the new Protestants unanimously despised the supposed idolatry and sorcery of this 'Marian cult', and Mary quickly became a non-person to them. Unfortunately this put them back in the position of the Old Testament Hebrews, where righteousness and obedience to the Law were far more important and relevant than was the *agape*, the modesty, and the forgiveness of the New Testament. The religion of all of Northern Europe was now effectively (and officially) patriarchal and anti-feminine.

And all those stories of witches being burned at the stake? This incredible fear of the feminine didn't primarily happen until *after* the Reformation. And it occurred almost exclusively in Protestant countries.

But the Reformation didn't just break the coeval bond of the masculine and feminine. It also planted the seeds of rampant individualism.

In his book 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism' the early 20th Century sociologist Max Weber hypothesized that it was the sober industriousness of the Calvinist Protestants which lay the foundation for the modern industrial world. Nowadays the Confucian work ethics of Japan, Korea, and China, not to mention the Hindu work ethic which has made East Indians the wealthiest ethnic group in

America, have shown us how provincial Weber's thinking was. Further, you can well imagine that those Medieval monasteries were a lot less frivolous than even the most seriously minded of Puritan communities.

But, as just noted three episodes ago, in the High Middle Ages greed was considered perhaps the worst of all those seven mortal sins of Self-Idolatry. So that although even back then work was considered worship, it was also crucial that one shared the fruits of one's labor. Calvinists in particular, though, were smugly sure that they were members of that Elect few. So why should they care about all the world's hopelessly lost sinners who were going to Hell anyway?

And this led to the largest, subtlest, and probably most damaging of the Reformation's effects. Because the Catholic Church, *by definition*, had included every single person in existence under its umbrella. On the macrocosmic level this created a transnational sensibility even before the nation-state had been invented. At the local level this meant that ties of faith held people together almost as much as did ties of family. When people went to communion they were also *communing* with others of the *commune*. Confession to a priest meant that you were sharing your innermost failings with someone explicitly acknowledged to be a representative of the collective whole.

By suddenly throwing aside all of those religious traditions which had slowly accumulated over the centuries, though, the Reformation also threw away all sorts of cultural niceties which had bound disparate peoples together. This is not to say that the new Protestant congregations were socially incoherent. Or that their members were wallowing in wanton sin. But the very concept of sin was slowly changing, from a sophisticated understanding of the nature of anger, pride, envy, etc., and back to the Old Testament's tribal checklist of do's and don't's.

So in many ways small and large the fabric of communal sense was starting to unravel. And the cult of the individual, which had seemed so obscene to Northern Europe when Machiavelli and the Italians were preaching and practicing it at the start of the 16th Century, was now implanted up there, also.

Oh, and remember Erasmus, that gentle and evolved soul who had believed in a renewed Church which would nurture humanity as it evolved ever upward? By the time he died in 1539 he was despised by all the people in power. By the Protestants for not having joined them in the destruction of the horrible, evil Church. And by the Catholics for, in their view, having opened the door of open debate and honest disagreement in the first place.

Anyway, enough about all that. Because now we're about to emerge into the 17th Century. And start discussing the precursors to that Age of Enlightenment.

But, of course, that is for next time. For this time the time is up. And it is time to say thank you once again for so far having listened.