

Witchcraft, Martin Luther and Renaissance Popes

OVER THE COURSE OF THE SECOND CHRISTIAN MILLENNIUM PERSONAL CONSCIENCE HAD TO HABITUATE ITSELF TO THE REPRESSIVE ORTHODOXIES OF STATIC RELIGION. RELIGION IS "CATHOLIC" WHEN IT IS COSMICLY INFORMED, THAT IS, WHEN FAITH IS CONSCIOUSLY RATIONAL AND CONSCIONABLY OPEN.

ROMAN CATHOLICISM, INSTEAD OF BEING OPEN TO TRANSFORMATION, INFORMATION AND FORMATION, PLACED FAITH EXPECTATION IN THE IMPERIAL MODEL OF ROMAN CAESARS. CATHOLICISM'S PAX ROMANA WAS INSTITUTED NOT BY PERSONAL CONSCIENCE BUT BY THE SUPPRESSION OF PERSONAL CONSCIENCE AND ENFORCED SUBMISSION TO THE LEGALISMS OF CONTROLLING INSTITUTIONS.

THE DAYS OF RELIGIOUS MONARCHY, OF IMPERIAL DESPOTISM, LIKE THE DAYS OF STATE MONARCHY AND AUTHORITARIANISM ARE OVER. ABSOLUTISM IS OLD CLOTH THAT DOES NOT WEAR WELL EITHER ON POLITICAL GOVERNANCE OR ON RELIGIOUS AUTHENTICITY. IT IS TIME NOW, AT THE BEGINNING OF THE THIRD CHRISTIAN MILLENNIUM, TO CONSIGN TO HISTORY IMPERIAL REPRESSIONS AND OLD ABSOLUTISMS, AND TO APPLY THE LEARNED LESSONS OF HISTORY.

"From the end of the fifteenth century until the middle of the seventeenth century we have one climate, the climate of the Renaissance; then in the middle of the seventeenth century we have the years of change, the years of revolution; and thereafter for another century and a half we have another very different climate, the climate of Enlightenment." (Trevor-Roper, ID: PP 46-47)

In the course of the second millennium great havoc visited Earth as a consequence of imperial religion /government. Sophisticated as we think we are, we are not above visiting more havoc on Earth. Ideologies are on a rampage; too often havoc more than sense comes from them. Those that pass the test of faith and reason coincide with public purpose; those inimical to public purpose leave calamity in their wake.

To today's way of thinking, the things that went on in the second millennium are scarcely believable; a reading of its history is more fantastical than fiction. To the readers of history 1000 years from now what is going on now may seem even more fantastical and unbelievable than what happened in the second millennium. Evolved sensibility might wish that it be done with the rampage of engrained patriarchy; perhaps only the calm of age can calm rage and realize that the tide of youthful testosterone overwhelms reason and faith and precipitates havoc in every generation.

In Martin Luther's consequential years—the climate of Renaissance—there was a push for church reform that was resisted by the imperial types who had the most to lose personally from reform. The history of popular protest for reform (prior to and after 1650) and the harsh, formal and offensive reaction taken officially by the Catholic Church (Councils of Trent and Vatican I) was tragic and humanity still suffers from it, as does the Catholic Church for its bad treatment of reformers. The corruption of monarchical church and state had massively wasted the people, and the burnout of imperial rule as an effective form of governance was becoming all too obvious. But the benefits to the people in high places were too sweet to be easily given up. And so conflicts devastated good sense, and still do.

Europe was explosively charged with dissatisfaction. The suppressive “Pax Christiana” that prevailed empire-wide was not all that different from the “Pax Romana” that prevailed under the Roman Caesars in Jesus’ time, except that old Roman mythologies had largely been replaced by Christian stories. Institutional fixations, rooted in the consciousness of the time, were put in place empire-wide, some of which were eventually found over time to be literally untenable as were old mythologies. Fixations of all types are likely to be exposed for their failed ability to anticipate evolving consciousness and its recognized need for good-sense change.

The build-up of put-off changes called for by evolutionary sense is in the present time a sore spot to a worldview now removed from that of the old time. Fixation in centrism, staticism and absolutism becomes a matter of derision to the modern sense of quantum relativity. The traditional cult of spirit/ matter dualism fails to grasp the unitary co-dependency of soul /body and the energetic universality of quantum-substantiated matter. Spirituality and materiality, body and soul were perceived as inveterate enemies to each other. Newness is the makeover of oldness, the subtle rearrangement of common quanta; which is to say that newness is the makeover of consciousness (energy) even as it is the makeover of the embodiment (matter) of energy. The ephemeral character of quantum reality is evident in space /time transformation and evolutionary change. All substantiated energy is subject to change; quanta cannot be fixated in unchangeable forms. Old wisdom and new testify to the reality: here today, gone tomorrow; material substance does not last forever.

The process of people reform is enabled by good faith communication. However, communication can be ambiguous; it can serve to mitigate enmities or agitate and solidify distrust between and amongst ideologies. The polarized culture of ideology-based enmity defeats faith, hope and love because it defeats trust, the condition of good faith communication.

The Counter Reformation (the Council of Trent) agitated enmity and distrust between the Roman Catholic Church and would-be reformers, and so the anti-social defeat of faith, hope and love was accomplished by imperial church. Because Counter-Reformation ecclesiology was fixed in belief that institutional Catholicism was the absolute and inerrant arbiter in matters of faith and morals, the church instituted in 1554 the first Index of Forbidden Books, promulgated by the Inquisition (now the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith) in order to protect the faithful from reading things that reflected badly on Catholicism and the conduct of its divinely competent guardians; included ipso facto on the Index were Martin Luther’s writings. (In 1966, the church terminated the Index.) Besides its Counter-Reformation purpose, the Index meant to stifle dissent within the church and to keep the public uninformed in the less than edifying and gross corruptions of the high clergy. The institutional policy to cover up the scandalous conduct of clerics owes in no small part to the church-centric ecclesiology of the Council of Trent developed by Theologian Robert Cardinal Bellarmine, SJ.

The Spanish soldier Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) specifically created the Society of Jesus to counteract the loss of priests from the church and to raise the quality of the priesthood—noble objectives without a doubt. Jesuits vowed to serve popes without reservation. It is no surprise that the Jesuits enjoyed papal protection and that they played a pivotal role in the church’s decision to mount an obdurate offensive against Reformation pressures from within the church and from without, notwithstanding the many voices of reason, which sought the peaceable reform of high corruption and public

scandal. In retrospect, one gets a sense that the Jesuits have ended up on the wrong side of history as far as their role in the Counter-Reformation is concerned, namely, being defenders of centrism, staticism and absolutism.

For good or for ill, the political canonization of the papal person and the deification of his judgment seem characteristically “Jesuitical”. Fixation in pre-Vatican II ecclesiology now weakens church credibility in matters of faith and morals. Papal predisposition seems still to favor the theology of the Counter-Reformation. The appointments of bishops and cardinals are at the sole discretion of the pope and they seem to be selectively qualified by the litmus test of papal favoritism for Vatican I closedness to Vatican Council II openness.

While the processes of reason and faith are cosmic in origin and the same now as a thousand years ago, the frustration of the process by closed mindedness has damaging consequences. Reason is faith’s enlightenment; hope is birthed in the mutuality of reason and faith; and love’s purpose is hope’s fulfillment—ongoing enlightenment. When reason is trashed, so is faith; when the mutuality of reason and faith is trashed, and so is hope; and when hope is trashed, so is love. The spirituality of quantum relativity is the common energy of religion and civility. The intention of purpose is both religious and civil. If intentional relationship isn’t religious (moral), it isn’t civil; if it isn’t civil, it isn’t religious, for there can be no pretense between what is religious and what is civil.

Primary spirituality, refined in conscience, is subtle energy that authenticates religion and civility. Personal conscience (authenticity) is not something one can surrender, whether to a person or to an institution; nor can another abrogate someone else’s personal authenticity—such abrogation is the overreach of another’s natural, human / divine right, duty. This is as true in the present time as it was in the past, notwithstanding institutional ideologies to the contrary. Martin Luther seems to have come to this radical belief, which was perceived by imperial religion to be such a threat. Religious rationality today (lay) is increasingly resistant to fideistic fixation; it is more disposed toward open theological consciousness whose causality is derived in cosmic rationality and edified in fidelity to the transformational cosmos and evolutionary life.

Martin Luther was born of severely religious parents who experienced more than a fair share of life’s difficulties for the times were unusually severe. Martin grew up a dutiful son, dutiful to family and to the faith of his upbringing. His firsthand witness of the horrors of the Black Death reinforced his spiritual awakening, for it had visited heavily on his family and community. Luther obeyed his father’s wish that he should study law. Eventually, however, his intuition for religious living prevailed upon him and he became an Augustinian monk of the stricter observance. It now seems so out-of-character that the upbringing of Martin should in his adult life take such an opposite turn that he would come to see his church as a conspirator of social, imperial evil.

In 1510 a life-defining event occurred that edged Martin ever more fatefully toward his unlikely mission of church Reformation. His religious Order sent him on a foot-journey to Rome. Martin’s upbringing had instilled in him respectfulness, even worshipful awe, for the spiritual center of the church of his upbringing. Rome was then in a time of High Renaissance; the pope engaged Michelangelo and Raphael in art restoration, and the new (present) Basilica of St. Peter in Rome was under construction. Martin was totally unprepared for the culture shock that was to be his with his actual experience of Rome and church mercantilism. Its crass worldliness, its carnal corruption, its pomp and

extravagant wealth, its pretense, were so totally in contrast to his monastic persona, beyond the pale for this monk of simple culture.

Martin's campaign against the corruption of the Catholic Church is blamed (credited?) for the Protestant revolt. The Protestant uprising was never intended, planned or expected by him. When he wrote his original 95 theses he did so in Latin for it was his expectation that they would become issues of scholarly discussion. These were presented to his university (Wittenberg) colleagues for disputation. Not by his doing, someone translated his theses into German and had them published. Europe and the world got caught up in the tidal response that followed.

To omit mention of the invention of the printing press (1453) by Gutenberg (1396-1468) some thirty years before Luther's birth would neglect to acknowledge the vehicle that enabled the dissemination of Luther's writings that aroused a down-trodden public and set the stage for the exposure of religious and political cover-ups for generations to come. The printing press represents a quantum leap in political history and human consciousness. [Another quantum leap occurring at the present time is the mass usage of the personal computer, which enables any person to desktop publish and be in virtual contact with virtually any other person in the universe. The power of the PC puts at greater risk institutions and individuals who would scam others; but it also opens new opportunities for scamming.]

The circumstances that drove Luther to write his 95 theses are emblematic of the religious/ political corruption of the time; they have to do with the unsavory selling of indulgences in Germany (1517). This [crassly secular scam] involved the archbishop of Mainz, Albert of Hohenzollern. The wars of Pope Julius II and the High Renaissance ambitions of Pope Leo X, Giovanni de' Medici needed lots of money. Times were then and had been for a long time very tough on the people. The problem was how to get money from the people and avoid further depressing them. It so happened that Albert, the youngest brother of the Elector of Brandenburg, a man in his early twenties, was too young to be appointed a bishop when the Sees of Magdeburg and Halbestadt were open. Not to be deterred he incurred a heavy debt to Rome in buying a dispensation so he could be appointed.

Within a year of his appointment the See of Mainz became vacant and he needed more money for a dispensation to become archbishop of Mainz. He borrowed heavily from the Fugger bankers and arranged with Pope Leo X a strategy to pay his debt and also to provide money for the pope's enterprises in Rome. By promising spiritual rewards to the people for their contribution it made it more tolerable for the people to be generous in giving. So the notorious scam of selling indulgences was set in motion. The concession for selling indulgences in Germany was assigned to a Dominican friar, Johann Tetzel, who by some reckoning may have collected indulgence monies amounting to perhaps millions of dollars in modern currency. The Vatican and the banker were the major beneficiaries. This egregious matter of selling spiritual reward came to Luther's attention, and every fiber of integrity in his body was outraged. However, Luther apparently did not know the connection of the archbishop to this scheme. (Lerner et al, ID: Pg 480)

[The scams of stockbrokers today somehow seem less egregious for at least they do not make religious pretenses when representing stocks.] The corrupt secularism of the high clergy demanded reform. Imperially imposed violations of public sensibility, including irrational faith-expectations, the quick labeling as heretics any one who deviated in

matters of public piety (even subtle points of theology) and punishing offenders with death contributed to a boiling climate of spiritual frustration.

There were many reasonable heads working within the church who urged the calling of a General Church Council to deal with issues of institutional corruption. Popes were also cognizant of the need for reform. Pope Adrian VI, like Pope Paul II before him, was conscious of his personal responsibility for the church's spiritual well-being, and he full well understood the diseased condition of the church's spirituality and remedies needed.

Curial obsessions for patronage and material pleasure ("carnales") were a public scandal and an all-too-obvious obstacle to honest spirituality. Adrian VI put the full weight of his authority behind a movement to bring about the reform of the curia. But his effort was doomed from the start because it aimed to eradicate the money-base that enriched the curia, and the papacy. Because he was a non-Italian he held no power of persuasion over the predominantly Italian curia. Adrian fully understood that the papacy itself was precisely the cause of corruption within the church. The Diet of Nuremberg was to deal with the matter of a General Church Council; Adrian sent a personal emissary to urge calling a reform Council and had an emissary deliver his personal pleading:

"We know very well that even in the Holy See there have over the past years occurred many scandals, abuses in spiritual matters, and violations of the commandments that have become an open scandal to all. Hence it is not surprising that this sickness has been transplanted from the head to the members". (Dolan, ID: PG 315)

Pope Adrian's initiative died with him in September 1523; nor did his immediate successor, Clement VII, the illegitimate son of Giulio de' Medici, have any will to take up the matter of a reform council because "conciliarism", the hot issue in the curia, directly threatened his papal authority. A council then might well have been a bigger problem for the pope than for the curia, so action was mooted.

The conflict between the authority of the curia (conciliarism) and the pope (infallibilism) was an old problem. Already by April of 1378 the hegemony of the church had reached an impasse between two competing popes, the pope in Rome, favoring infallibilism and the pope (Urban) in Avignon supporting the curia's position on conciliarism. The oligarchic disposition of the College of Cardinals (curia) was not of a mind to submit to authority outside their ranks. Clement VII at Avignon did not recognize Urban's (a onetime member of the Avignon curia) papal appointment, only that he was nominated. The final coming of the church to schism over infallibilism/ conciliarism highlighted the overdue need in church for reform. Pope Pius II laid out the crises:

"Christendom has no longer any leader whom it respects or is willing to obey; the titles Emperor and Sovereign Pontiff are for it no longer anything more than names without reality and those who bear them are in its eyes vain images". ...The real cause of the schism" writes Dolan, "was to be found in the abasement of the papacy itself, its secularization, its preoccupation with fiscal matters, and its glaring lack of spiritual ideals". (ID: PP 105-138)

In 1377 Saint Catherine of Sienna wrote the pope: "God wills and demands that you, according to your power, should take your dominion from the hands of demons [Curia]. Set yourself to freeing the holy Church from the foul smell of her ministers; weed out

these stinking flowers; plant in their place sweet-smelling ones, virtuous men who fear God.”

Times and their events are a fluid mixture; the past flows into the present and the present flows into the future. History’s colors are often murky because of the random mixing of unlikely and immiscible events in unlikely times. Clarification is often difficult. Hugh Trevor-Roper (ID: Chapter 3, “The European Witch-craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries”, pp 83-177) approaches carefully the murky and obscene use of confessions extracted from women by Dominican monks in the sixteenth century to prove in Inquisition that women by their own admission were witches—consorts with the devil.

Church Inquisitions were in two jurisdictions. The first jurisdiction was the Spanish (medieval) Inquisition (c: 1150-1550) and the second was the Roman (Renaissance) Inquisition (c: 1550-1700). Both were formally sanctioned by Rome and both were commissioned in the matter of witch-hunts; witchcraft carried the liability of heresy, torture and death. The jurisdiction of the Spanish Inquisition eventually came to be rather seamlessly absorbed into the Roman Inquisition also for reasons of political problems that arose between Spain and the Vatican. The new positive doctrine of witchcraft was in place and in final form by 1490:

“The monks of the late Middle Ages sowed; the lawyers of the sixteenth century reaped; and what a harvest of witches they gathered,” (Trevor-Roper ID: pg 86)
“If the universal scapegoat of the Black Death in Germany had been the Jew, the universal scapegoat of the Wars of Religion will be the witch...really good Germans (like Luther) would contrive to hate both together.” (ID: pg 102)

The Dominicans Heinrich (Institor) Krämer, the church’s inquisitor in Tyrol, Bohemia and Moravia and Jacob Spengler together wrote the “Malleus Maleficarum” (The Hammer of Witches), published in 1486, and “artfully” prepared the theological climate with the approval of Pope Innocent VIII. This publication meant to elucidate, somewhat in the manner of the Dominican Thomas Aquinas, the realm of demons, spirits who intend evil, as parallel to the realm of angels in Aquinas’s Summa. The demonology document provided the theological cover that ignited and fueled the witch-craze across Europe. (Trevor-Roper, ID: pg 93)

In this latter and most vicious time of the witch-craze the catholic monks had their counterparts in the Protestant clergy (probably because these onetime Catholics carried with them old prejudices of catholic upbringing). In the time of the English civil war, Matthew Hopkins gained fame as the “witch-finder general”. Trevor-Roper says:

“From the fantasies of mountain peasants, the Dominicans elaborated their systematic demonology and enabled or compelled Renaissance popes to denounce a new heresy in Europe”.

This was a 180-degree about-face from canon law doctrine, which, after the first inquisitional go-around, established the formal position of church that witches did not exist. Trevor-Roper characterizes the Renaissance as “a revival not only of pagan letters but (also) of pagan mystery-religion.” (ID: pg 83) The horror of the witch-craze was incremental; from 1550-1600 it was more virulent than during the previous fifty years; but from 1600-1650 it was in an order of greater magnitude.

“...If we look at the revival of the witch-craze in the 1560s in its context, we see that it is not the product either of Protestantism or Catholicism, but of both: or rather, of their conflict. Just as the medieval Dominican evangelists had ascribed witch-beliefs to the whole society which resisted them, so both the Protestant and Catholic evangelists of the mid-sixteenth century ascribed the same beliefs to the societies which opposed them...if the Dominicans had been the evangelists of the medieval Counter-Reformation, the Jesuits were the evangelists of the sixteenth century Counter-Reformation, and if Protestant evangelists carried the craze to the countries which they conquered for Reform, these Catholic evangelists carried it equally to the countries which they re-conquered for Rome” (ID: pp 128-129)

If the theology of Thomistic Scholasticism first served the Dominicans in the confessional usage to prove witchcraft, so the fine-tuned confessional casuistry of the Jesuits served even more effectively the same purpose in their time. Perhaps nothing discredits confession more than the abuse of it by confessors who persuaded penitent and malleable women to admit complicity with the devil and thereby justify church determination in its vicious prosecution and alienation of them.

The prosecution of women as witches by institutional Christianity is perhaps the extreme measure of the depths of corrupt faith and morals to which the “evil” Empire had fallen. What is unsettling to consider even now is that the theology of demonology and of female complicity with the devil have not been rejected by the Roman Catholic Church. The present papacy seems to accept the ancient theology of demonology as a parallel realm to the angel realm, as developed by Krämer and Spengler. That this is true seems bolstered by the fact that the church has also avoided apologizing to women for the enormous injustice and scandal against them that it officially perpetrate(d)s.

The eventual canonization of Joan of Arc hardly serves as an apology. If the pope could apologize for the church’s injustice against Galileo, what is the problem with apologizing to women for the horrendous and ongoing violations of them—and more importantly of proactively remedying the cultural alienation of women by hierarchical authority in the church? The irreligion and incivility of this! How can males rationalize their arrogance and complicity with evil and at the same time pretentiously take such a righteous and indignant attitude against women? One wonders if the modern “fad” toward same-sex liaisons isn’t somehow a by-product of deep-patterned, male desecration of women and sexuality; genetic/ memetic mechanisms of consciousness respond negatively [suffer deep trauma] to persisting psychological insult, and positively to affirmation.

The evolution of quantum relativity imprints patterns in two great and mutually reinforcing paradigms/ mechanisms that well serve religion and civility. The first is DNA, which is life’s physical/ chemical pattern of evolutionary structuring that implicates the dynamics of psychological transformation; the second is the psychological process of memetic, intentional rationality (trimorphic resonance), which implicates the dynamics of physical transformation. The relativity of these enables sustainable mind/ body evolution. Humans have control over personal intention and its direct effects on genetic patterning, but fixation in fideism violates both paradigms and impacts the future with inauthentic consequence, as history testifies.

The Renaissance Popes (1450-1600)

The parallel monarchies of church and state dominated Europe for a thousand years and tracked around the world the footprint of Caesar's Rome. In medieval Europe privilege and power married favor and patronage for purposes of controlling wealth and political dominion. The same parentage produced royalty, clergy and merchants who dominated the high societies of politics, religion and wealth. By liaisons of flesh, incestuous and simoniacal, wealth and power lusted over European city/ states and stimulated wars of obsession against the people and the land—for centuries. The absolutisms of privilege and control corrupted absolutely the people in high places whose culture is an inheritance of disease in the spiritual/ material persona of the modern world.

As a partisan Roman Catholic I long held the belief that Martin Luther was at fault for instigating the Protestant Reformation. I think quite differently now. He, amongst the Catholic faithful who worked for reform, was not alone in frustration over high-church corruption and the devastation it wrought on the indentured people. (Consider the irony, that is was Leo X, the indulgence-peddler, who excommunicated Luther!) I once was of a frame of mind that the sale of indulgences was a rather insignificant matter, a flimsy justification of rebellion; while it may be true that amongst the church's varied money-raising devices of the time it was not the main one, nevertheless, it is a measure of the utter depth to which corruption had overtaken church and state, namely, to their wholesale surrender to prostitution, mercantilism and secularism. I no longer put the blame on Luther but on the corruption of high church. The church's hardnosed refusal to admit its desperate, despotic, degenerate condition, and the need for reform of faith and morals, included even the calculated assertion of arrogance and violence that didn't hesitate to use torture and stake-burnings to prove that it took seriously its belief in its own infallibility. The public chafed in frustration under such insolence and outrageous hurt; it could only wait and pray for a Luther, and when he appeared it responded big-time.

The sinister agenda of obsessive church/ state had consequences beyond personal injury; church agenda grew into dark causes that dominated and marginalized the masses and perpetuated a male caste system stratified and divided by privilege and disaffection. The cultured secularism of obsessive church and state and their mercantile appetites for kingdom building, were doubly hurtful because of redundant infrastructures insisted by both; their schizophrenic psychology and structural redundancy remain to this day a suppressive economic/ social burden.

The crass secularism of the Renaissance popes stamped church in a mold Jesus never intended, the mold of secular materialism. Is it any wonder that distrust is even now stamped on people's minds and dogs church for its fixation in kingdom building? Lust for power and control is a demonic god in authoritarian heads, a secular fever of arrogance that radically diseases people. In church, curial cardinals weighed in against the infallible pretenses of secular-minded popes, and the popes returned their demagoguery. The power struggle within the church today, between conciliarism and infallibilism, continues and the people are justifiably distrustful of authoritarian arrogance, whether of church or state. Really! Councils make mistakes and popes make mistakes. Even best decisions carry with them a mix of good and evil. It is a matter of evolutionary experience that nothing in human affairs is absolute. Nature is open to ambiguity.

The era of the Renaissance is usually divided into the early Renaissance (1417-1500), from Martin V, Roman pope from 1417-1431, and Avignon Pope Clement VIII 1423-

1429) to Alexander VI (1492-1503), and the high Renaissance (1500-1600), from Alexander VI to Clement VIII (1592-1605). History flows like a river so that sectioning it into arbitrary periods of time based on marker events or people is imprecise and can be misleading. Depending on the perspective from which one looks, dates may be adjusted to accommodate. So the reader is asked not to hold my arbitrary choices here against me, for I think I do no violence to history.

Enlightenment must be seen as coincidentally evolved with the rise of reason, the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation; thus, the hard fixing of dates for each of these co-evolutionary events is misrepresentative of what was actually happening. My purpose of dating this overview of the papacy from Nicholas V to Clement VIII is to give the flavor of imperial church as it contributed to the complex dynamics of this historically determinative period.

Religion and civility are essential qualifiers of functional society even as faith and reason are essential qualifiers of religion and civility. Religion is clarified against the witness of irreligion, and civility is clarified against the witness of incivility. The purpose here is historical clarification for the better discernment of direction into the future. If this reflects badly on church it isn't my fault; nor do I detail this embarrassing period of history to embarrass church. The greater harm is that which arises from public ignorance of history. I do not mean to claim any greater or lesser virtue for our time than for Renaissance times, only that the vision and politics of one time do not suit every time [even though their consequences flow on.] Religiously and irreligiously, civilly and uncivilly, each generation reflects its time. In their historical interaction, it becomes clear that incivility and irreligion, and religion and civility are opposites of one another—and therefore instructive to consciousness.

The papacies of Alexander VI, Julius II and Leo X define the critical time of “high” Renaissance. To the sensibilities of modern Christians and decent people in general, this period is one of high shame for it represents a time of gross obsession and ambition of popes for political expansion and national/ global exploitation. Stolen public wealth fueled the sinful ambitions of secular-minded popes and wreaked havoc on local economies and on colonized economies, in sorry ways that continue to our very time.

Alexander VI, the most notorious Borgia (Spanish) pope, is emblematic of the egregious shamelessness that wantonly served papal ambition and pleasure. He used his own children in his political machinations, both for political expansion and personal indulgence. From today's vantage it is very obvious why the church created the Index of Forbidden Books, namely, to keep the laity uninformed about high scandal in high church. [Witness the actions of bishops to cover up for the sexual abuses of priests. In modern time governments call it “damage control” and justify it for reasons of security. Again, however, I caution against being too self-righteously indignant toward past abuses of church and state because political passion today for expansion and exploitation is no less hurtful and no more righteous than that of Renaissance royalty, whether church or state. True, Rome still seems to cling to the belief, as it has been handed down from ancient presumption, that by divine design it owns universal religion (Catholicism) as a kind of Italian fiefdom through which it has right of absolute and infallible authority over people globally. The recent papal statement forbidding discussions of women ordination smacks of institutionally habituated prejudice and [cultural male] arrogance. **[RELIGION & CIVILITY, The Primacy of Conscience, pp167-177]**
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