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THE HIDDEN REASON WHY THE REFORMATION SUCCEEDED

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Abstract

The reason that the Reformation happened half a millennium ago was not the corruption in the Catholic Church, but a lack of confidence in the authority and ability of the clergy to connect one with God. Contributing to this attitude were the Black Death which disproportionately killed clergy (who had to be replaced quickly by less well-formed clergy) and the Great Western Schism which diminished the respect for the pope. The position arose that one could connect with God without the assistance of a hierarchy or their sacramental powers. Secular rulers took advantage of this new attitude to further their own ambitions.

Keywords: Authority, Black Death, Catholic Church, Early Universities, Great Western Schism, Reformation

In this 500th year anniversary of the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, Pope Francis' visit to Scandinavia for a "commemoration" of that event, combined with prayers from both sides asking forgiveness for the violence that followed the 95 Theses of Luther, makes the pope's visit sound much like an acceptance of

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blame.[1] From the media stories, it is easy for Catholics to be lulled into the reformer's claim that the corruption that had crept into the Catholic Church had broken the connection the apostles had with Christ and somehow caused the reformers to purify the community of such accretions by re-forming the church. Indeed, even though we as Catholics may still believe that we belong to the one true Church and that it did not lose the connection with the apostles, those of us whose literary culture has been influenced by British heritage and perspectives, whether we be from Southern Africa, North America or South Asia, can easily be tempted to accept that excuse of "too much corruption to live with." Instead, the real story leading up to the Reformation is significantly different.

Moving beyond Authority-based Teaching

The decades leading up to 1517 were not really any worse or better than those that preceded it. The Church has always been composed of sinners — but also of great saints. The early Church had many faithful who were martyred, but also watched many fell away (1 Jn 2:19). It even saw the conflict between Pontian and Hippolytus produce the first anti-pope in 232, but also saw them reconciled and martyred in 235 — and sharing the same feast day. Because the Church is composed of human members, our history includes barbarian invasions, dynastic squabbles in the Holy Roman Empire and Italian city-states, and multiple conflicts between neighbours like England and France in the 100-years-war; but there have also been great accomplishments. Soaring cathedrals (which are both the house of God and the house of the poor) and their cathedral schools, as well as monastic communities which enhanced agriculture, science and engineering, together developed into early universities — all under church sponsorship. Gregorian chant, developments in medicine, printing, and even speculative theology all flourished. There were schisms and heresies, but also preachers and reconcilers who put communities back together. Even the rise of the merchant class was balanced by mendicant orders like the Franciscans and Dominicans. So why did this particular rupture in 1517 spread so thoroughly and remain, unlike so many before it that arose then died out?

The primary reason was the erosion of respect for authority and reliance upon it. Beginning as early as the tenth century and continuing through the fifteenth century, scholars would establish arguments and prove their points by appealing to authorities: ancient

[1]Cardinal Koch, *Catholic News Service*, 2 June 1017, www.catholicnews.com

Greek and Latin authors, Sacred Scripture, the Fathers of the Church (Greek, Latin and Syriac), and papal or Conciliar promulgations. Indeed, these were often the only writings that were available. The barbarian invaders had folklore tales transmitted orally and folk medicines handed down often from mother to daughter and midwife to midwife, but no real compendium of scientific knowledge or medical practice in any way comparable to what the Greeks had put together. The Latins had adapted these to their own ends by adding engineering and commerce to those standards. The authority of virtually anything that was written remained unchallenged for quite some time mainly because there was no competitor. However, over the centuries some of the Greek and Latin authors were proven incorrect in some scientific areas; but they were simply dismissed as "mistakes of misguided pagans" whereas the bible and church authorities were still respected. Indeed, much of the medical studies and early scientific experiments were supported by church institutions, for all pointed to God as the wonderful designer and master of the universe, and these new developments were seen as augmentations to ancient secular learning and biblical teaching rather than any challenge to it.

How did Authority Get Established?

In addition to the authority of the written materials handed down from ancient sources, the authority of persons who knew and interpreted these became established as well. We have all heard the phrase, "it's not what you know but who you know" a number of times, and we know that this phrase implies a sense of trust. Do people have confidence in us? Today there are "licensing standards" for a number of crafts, from specialized medicine and air travel to the persons who repair our cars or our homes. In more ancient times, the standards of those days were the recognized authorities: from master craftsmen in guilds to ancient philosophers to God himself speaking in sacred scripture and his official interpreters who were church authorities. In Jewish and Christian circles, those interpreters of divine authority were verified by both tracing their credentials and by miracles.

Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus, himself frequently used his miracles to show the Jewish leadership that he was legitimate.[2] Especially in the early Church, apostles performed many miracles to demonstrate that their "new way" of living out the call of God was the fulfilment of the promises made from the time of Abraham down to their day.

[2]Jn 10:38: "Even though you put no faith in me, put faith in these works..."

Indeed, the Sanhedrin tried to silence Peter and John after they had cured the man lame from birth at the beautiful gate of the temple — because that miracle, combined with the memory of Jesus' own miracles, established a legitimacy to their claim of worshipping in a new way (Cfr Acts 4:13-22).

The apostles' immediate successors, the Apostolic Fathers, had authority to interpret the writings of the apostles because they knew them personally. Along with the scriptures themselves, these interpretations carried great weight. [In Islam the Hadith plays the same role in understanding the teachings of the Koran.] The next generation of the Greek and Latin Fathers similarly appealed to both the scriptures and the oral tradition handed down to them from the whole Christian community (because not everything could be written down) and from the more prominent teachers: the authorities of that community. The further one got in time from the original Apostolic Age, the more necessary it became to reference these authorities — because they certainly had a closer connection to, and presumably a better understanding of, what the apostles meant in their teachings. Moreover, because the Greek Fathers delved heavily into the known works of ancient philosophers to explain Christianity to the learned of their day, not only were those ancient philosophers revered (almost as much by the Christian community as by the pagan intelligencia that predated it), but the church leaders were expected to know those ancient philosophers and were naturally considered by the populace of mediaeval Europe as legitimate interpreters of these philosophical authorities as well.

With the fall of the Western Roman Empire, civilization did not simply disappear from the continent of Europe. Not only was the Byzantine Empire still flourishing, but there were pockets of learning that developed even in the west.[3] These were nurtured both by the development of monasteries and by rulers of the large and small kingdoms who took over the remnants of that western empire — and who wanted to be accepted with the same status as the emperor in Constantinople. This meant having learned courtiers who could not only read communications but who could craft them in good language and write them down. In addition, many rulers wanted to have as much understanding as they could of what was being written in their name, so they endeavoured, to a greater or lesser extent, to

[3]Monasteries for both men and women produced Gregorian chant, a book of medical practices and herbs in 790, and even world-class female scholars like Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179). There were Cathedral Schools (900-1300), universities like Bologna (1088), Paris (1150) and a total of 81 respected universities by 1500.

become literate themselves and were even more encouraging of education for their children.

A final ingredient to this establishment of authority as the basis of argumentation among the learned, and as practice among the common folk, was the support of the types of highly monarchial government in vogue throughout this time period. Any support given to "authority" also naturally legitimized the decrees of the ruler in power at that time. Likewise, reverence for authority also supported the actions of the Church leaders — who were not merely speaking for God, but were the specific pathways to connect to that loving God. And their merciful God corroborated that authority by verifying the legitimacy of their beliefs and devotion through miracles at various times and places. In short, authority was the glue that held society together in the face of external raids and brutal infighting.

Pushing Geographic Boundaries

As the world of medieval Europe expanded, as more and more individual discoveries were being made, including Viking accounts of what would be called North America in 1000, to the Crusades beginning in 1099, to Marco Polo's accounts of his trip to China and India published in 1300, people's vision expanded. They moved beyond the authority of merely what someone before them had known. As individual experience and discoveries continued to multiply and were recorded and tales were told, this new block of information started to outweigh the quoted authorities. Initially this would have been accepted as a normal progression of belief supported by experience, for Christian hopes encouraged the discovering of "God's fingerprints" revealed by investigating more and more of his world. Great preachers referenced this, using both oratory and ongoing miracles, to verify that the living faith they were proclaiming was still true and valid — just as the apostles had used miracles and preaching to convert nations in their age (Cfr Acts 5:12-16, 8:4-8, etc.).

At first the new geographic boundaries were not a concern. The Magi and the Queen of Sheba were known from the bible. Seeing India and China as areas beyond "known Persia" from which the Magi had come was an easy step. Imagining Africa to extend considerably beyond Ethiopia was also possible, for exactly where the Queen of Sheba came from was never certain and could easily recede further and further to the south as tales came from there to these rather isolated thirteenth-century Europeans. However, as the

Vikings transitioned from raiders to traders following (some say as a result of) their conversion to Christianity, their journeys northeastward deep into the river systems of Russia, and northwest to Iceland, Greenland and North America (with some circumstantial evidence in Aztec mythology and practice that they got as far as Mexico) uncovered areas not at all described in the bible which could not be ignored.

Moreover, though everyone had heard talk about the emperor in Constantinople, the Crusades made that experience personal, and the 4th Crusade made that "high up" individual vulnerable: indeed replaceable. The crusades galvanized Europe, but they also reduced the sense of awe when describing the Holy Land. It became another real, visible place, ruled in fief just like all the lands near home — and subject to all the petty squabbles over each part of it.

Marco Polo, on the other hand, went to places that were very real (his uncles had traded there), but the accounts he described on his return awakened curiosity. Not only were there jewels and silk and spices with which everyone could identify, but he also described with the same clarity kites, fireworks, and oil that comes from the ground instead of olives. The Medieval world was expanding significantly beyond what their ancient authorities described. The medieval scholar began to realize that though the ancient authorities were not wrong, they were certainly not a complete description of the world God had created. Finding the rest of that world meant going *beyond* those authorities. Again, authorities were not disparaged, but the exclusive awe in which they were held was being diminished piece by piece.

What Criteria for Scientific Curiosity?

In a parallel way, the theologians of the second millennium slowly moved beyond an exclusive reliance on what the authorities before them had said. Though Anselm's (1033-1109) ontological argument for the existence of God went beyond Aristotle's "uncaused cause," his reasoning did not rely on observation. He would have fitted well with Plato or the Pythagoreans. Likewise, Bernard's (1090-1153) lofty devotional theology was a complement to the organizational and agricultural and engineering skills of his monks. In like manner, Peter Lombard's (1096-1160) sentences were the basis for commentary by all seminary students for the next several decades — all of whom used appeals to authority as the basis for their discussions. Indeed, Bonaventure (1221-1274), Aquinas (1226-1274), and Scotus (1266-1308) as well as the lesser-known theologians of their times all used

the standard approach of an appeal to authorities: citing a question, citing objections from different authors, giving one's own solution often supported immediately with a quote from the bible — after which followed a long discussion to prove the author's point. This became known as the "scholastic method" and was standard practice all while the geographic discoveries mentioned above were occurring.

A parallel method of discussion started to emerge form Albert the Great (1200-1280) and Roger Bacon (1214-1294). Works such as the Libelus of Alchemy referenced procedures handed down by others, but immediately listed Albert's own observations in considerable detail. Moreover, there were enough clear descriptions that one could reproduce the experimental combinations oneself — with the same empirical results. Such experimental records were not as such a contradiction of ancient authorities, but they were an alternative. Indeed, because many alchemical descriptions had wandered into Europe in unknown ways, often via Jewish or Islamic sources in Spain, an appeal to authority would have made such materials more suspect than if the "experimental data and results" were from the individual observations of clerical members of Catholic religious orders. Although there was some reluctance to accept the works of Albert and Bacon, their process and methods began to bear the same good results as the agriculture skills of the monks (rotating crops, new seed stock, cross-fertilization, even grafting, etc.) or the engineering skills of the builders of the cathedrals with their soaring towers and marvellous stained glass windows. Slowly, observation and good record keeping became as acceptable as an appeal to authority.

Into the European civilization during this same time frame (1200s) came paper.[4] This material allowed the spread of writing (notes, observations, poetry and literature, etc.) rather than just the reading of what had been painfully copied on parchment beforehand. Direct observations could be kept and circulated much more easily in the vernacular languages — and by many more people than simply the official clerical scribes. Though this was not in any way an attack on authority, it was a multiplication of writings and of writers. Moreover, as science and engineering and music and especially medical tracts were circulated, the contemporary writings began to take on parallel value to the ancient writings: diminishing their exclusivity (and the awe in which they were held) in the process. In conjunction with this diminished awe for ancient writings, the

[4]D. Steven Keller, "Paper," *World Book Encyclopedia*, Chicago: Scott Felzer Co, 2016, Vol. 15, 136.

prestige of the living actual *authors* began to compete with the prestige of mere *interpreters* of ancient writings.

Outright Challenges to Authority

Although the re-emergence of commerce in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which followed on the encounters between cultures involved in the Crusade journeys, brought increased access to delights like spices or silk or cotton, not all was smooth sailing. There were heresies that would sprout and threaten Christendom from time to time from Arianism to Albigensianism and a host of others. Yet the actions and appeal of great saints like Francis and Dominic and their followers overcame the threats that emerged and regularly restored areas of Europe devastated by these errors and the political and violent actions and counter-actions that ensued. However, there was one area that continued to trouble church teachers: Transubstantiation in the Holy Eucharist.

Berengarius of Tours (999-1088) was an exceptionally popular lecturer who preached with clarity and enthusiasm on a number of topics. However, his descriptions of what happens to the bread and wine at mass were so lacking that he was summoned to Rome to defend his position. Though Hildebrand, later pope St. Gregory VII, did everything he could to gently keep him within solid church doctrine, Berengarius was forced to sign a statement verifying his belief in the true and real presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Sadly, soon thereafter he drifted away from that affirmation again and again, unmoved by the authority of the pope or the Church's hierarchy or of even the unmistakable teaching of the gospel itself (Cfr Jn 6:56 ff).[5] The challenge of "what one sees is all there is" versus what the Church officially taught continued to raise challenges over the next few centuries as theologians tried to explain this doctrine to the leaders and the common folk. Unlike other issues, this was so critical and central (experienced each Sunday) that its explanation, however adequate or inadequate, affected all of life.

Because clerical students were generally expected to comment on the Sentences of Peter Lombard as part of their instructions, a discussion of the transformation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Jesus during the mass could not be avoided by each of these students. Aquinas used the concept of Transubstantiation, claiming that this transformation involved two miracles: a miraculous change

[5]George Sauvage, "Berengarius of Tours," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02487a.htm>

of the substance of the entity on the altar from bread to body and wine to blood, coextensive with a parallel miracle that kept the appearances [accidents] of the materials looking like the bread and wine. This fit well with Aquinas' proposition that all divine reality was essentially inaccessible to humans, that all we could experience of God was merely an analogy to him — but never truly know him because our human essence and divine being are different in kind, not just in degree. This significantly separated approaches based on experience from approaches based on authority — because for Aquinas God could never be reached by experience.

Scotus, on the other hand, argued for the "univocity of being," a difference in degree rather than kind, which implied that we could truly experience God even though God is so much greater than us. Scotus could explain that if a thirsty human were to drink from a huge lake, he would truly be connecting with that lake — though never exhausting it. Our connection with God is similar: we can truly know God even though we will never exhaust him. In line with other saints throughout the ages, Scotus offered the Incarnation as proof of that connectability, and applied this to the Eucharist by explaining how the bread and wine are taken up into the Body and Blood — parallel to the way water is taken up into our bodies to become a huge part of our blood without losing its essence as water but being a building block of our blood.[6] This kind of incorporation of the "lesser being" into the greater would allow for the retention of the appearances [accidents] of the bread and wine in the sacred Eucharist, while allowing the true essence [substance] of the Eucharist to be the reality of Jesus on that altar. The accidents we would apprehend with our bodily senses; the substance we would experience through a resonance with our souls.

Though Scotus (the champion of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception) remained deeply Catholic and is today declared a "blessed" in the Church, his approach of reconciling personal perception with authoritative belief in the sacraments was not as popular as Aquinas' position — and indeed has been frowned upon in theological and devotional writings. Perhaps his supposed connection to a reputed successor, William of Occam (1285-1374), made Scotus' approach to theology questionable. Occam advanced the proposition that one should eliminate all unnecessary parts of any explanation. This was later termed "Occam's razor" and became a

[6]St. John Damascene, Book IV *De Fide Orth.*, c. 13, Migne, *Patrologia Greca* [PG], 94:1144, 1149; St. Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Eranistes*, Dial. #2, PG, 83:167; St. Augustine, *De Symbolo*, *Patrologia Latina*, 35:1614, and even St Paul in 1 Cor 11:27.

source of contention with church authorities — including explanations of the Eucharist where Aquinas' postulation of two miracles instead of one miraculous presence infinitely greater than the sum of the parts used to produce it. In 1324 Occam was summoned to Avignon to show to the papal court there that he was not denying the supernatural aspects of the sacraments, particularly the sacred Eucharist.

Though Occam also remained in the Church his entire life, his disciple, John Wycliffe (1320-1384), did indeed deny the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist (and virulently attacked the authority of the papacy, monastic vows, and a number of other Catholic practices). He had a contempt for many of his fellow clergy and felt that their disproportionate demise in the black plague was God's just punishment on them. Wycliffe's translation of the bible into English, particularly while he was not in good favour with the church authorities of the time, showed how much one could do without authoritative approval. Indeed, he "maintained that all Christians should rely on the Bible rather than on the teachings of popes and clerics."[7] Arguments back and forth before English authorities and Roman ones continued for years. "In the years before his death in 1384 he increasingly argued for Scriptures as the authoritative centre of Christianity, that the claims of the papacy were unhistorical, that monasticism was irredeemably corrupt, and that the moral unworthiness of priests invalidated their office and sacraments."[8] Though Wycliffe died from a stroke while saying mass, thirty years later the Council of Constance declared him a heretic and ordered not only his writings be condemned and burnt but even his bones be exhumed from sacred ground and burned.

An acknowledged disciple of Wycliffe was the devout Czech clergyman, Jan Hus (1369-1415). He also argued that clergy were not the only authority on salvation, that folks should read the bible themselves, and in particular that if a priest were not in the state of grace himself the sacraments he offered were not valid or effective. Though Hus had good reason to be ashamed of many of the other clergy of his day (because of the results of the black plague described below), his teaching further denigrated the common people's respect for the capability (and hence authority) of the clergy. Inasmuch as there was no way for the faithful to determine from the outside

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[7]Richard Cavendish, "John Wycliffe Condemned as a Heretic," *History Today* 65, 5 (May 2015).

[8]*George Herring, Introduction To The History of Christianity, New York: New York University Press, 2006, 230.*

whether or not the priest was in the state of grace, this doctrine also weakened the faithful's confidence in the Blessed Eucharist, a sacrament that had continually been under attack from the time of Berengarius. Although Hus's heresy was proven wrong (priests are instruments in the hand of Christ, who is the real one who heals and sanctifies; and He can use a dirty or broken tool if that is all He has), the disreputable actions of the cardinals and bishops at the Council of Constance in condemning Hus to death after a guarantee of safe conduct so angered his followers that they rose in open rebellion. Only after pitched military battles and the concession of the chalice to some of Hus's followers, the Calixtines, who were content to reconcile if the chalice of the Blood of Christ were permitted them [as had been the practice earlier], was this disruption of Christendom contained — though not completely healed. Although Hus had good reason to advocate, along with many others within the church, for the reform of the whole Church "in Head and members" as was attempted unsuccessfully both at the councils of Florence (1439) and Lateran V (1512-17), two developments immediately before Hus's time catapulted the diminishment of the authority of the Church into catastrophic territory, and brought about the conditions for the Reformation to succeed.

The Black Plague

Though trust in *secular* authorities had diminished significantly in western Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire, and was only partially revived under Charlemagne before deteriorating again under his successors and the petty squabbles of local landed gentry, trust in the Church as the common bond and sustaining element of society remained through all the ups and downs of European history. Moreover, though Church authorities did not need observable data to corroborate their teaching about things that seemed to contradict observations, they relied on their authority from God to teach the truth. The church leaders also had a history of good example and pastoral care of their people to support the trust given them by the faithful. They also had many miracles to bolster the authority with which they taught. Two major changes shattered that trust in church authorities: The Great Western Schism and the black plague.

Although there had been Viking and Saracen raids as well as various local wars and crop failures and diseases throughout the Middle Ages, cathedrals still got built and universities were founded and commerce began to flourish. Suddenly, in 1346, the black death (or bubonic plague) began to devastate Europe more thoroughly than

all of these previous smaller disasters combined. Not only was it widespread, with some estimates as high as a third of the population, it also disproportionately killed the clergy and religious who were caring for those affected. As Wycliffe observed, not only did the clergy succumb to this disease themselves in huge numbers, their deaths removed the caregivers — causing greater anguish among the faithful. A worse effect, however, was the disruption of sacraments, particularly for the dying. The bishops had to replace the lost clergy quickly, often by ordaining priests after only partial training. Moreover, because the plague attacked in successive waves over more than a decade, those secondary clergy were affected as well — causing the bishops (those who were still alive themselves) to ordain even less thoroughly prepared priests to care for these subsequent waves of dying faithful. Though clergy had been affected in various wars and plagues before, never had so many been killed while heroically caring for the faithful.

Lingering Devastation of the Plague

The secondary devastating effect of this plague was the significant lowering in quality of the clergy who remained alive after it. Yes, they could still do sacraments that (everyone hoped) were still effective, but their ability to counsel troubled souls was diminished to the point of being lacking in many cases. They knew little more theology than the faithful they were instructing in their sermons — and sometimes considerably less. The worst effect was on the university and seminary faculties who also caught the plague and died, leaving the instruction in quality theology to inadequately trained replacements. The result was that though the parish priest used to be the "expert" in the local community, indeed often the only one who could read and write and the only one who could advocate for the populace against the whims of the gentry, during the few generations after the plague the clergy at that time were less educated and less capable than many of the lay faithful who had survived. Sadly, training in virtue was also less than complete for those clergy who were ordained "quickly" in this emergency, so their human faults were as evident as those of the faithful — for whom they ceased to be a good example. The plague had shattered the authority of the "local church" leadership.

Great Western Schism

The authority of the universal Church was similarly shattered by the Great Western Schism. From 1378 to 1417 there were two individuals both claiming to be pope — and who excommunicated

the followers of the rival claimant. Kings and emperors were confused, as were bishops and several great saints. After these 40 years of uncertainty and various attempts to reconcile the situation, including one attempt that only produced a third claimant to the papacy, the bishops gathered in council at Constance. They convinced one claimant to resign, deposed the other two, and finally elected Martin V from whom all subsequent popes descend. As a result of this action, some claimed that the actions of the council were superior to that of the pope. For several subsequent decades, the authority of the papacy was so diminished that "the view known as the 'Conciliar Movement'... divided and weakened the church."[9]

In short, the confidence in the leadership and holiness of the local clergy and of the bishops of that ecumenical council and of the pope as vicar of Christ was so severely eroded that the reformers considered them unnecessary for salvation — despite the reforms made by the Council of Florence which even reunited eastern and western Christianity at least for a time.

This weakening of the papacy as a binding force could not have come at a worse time. As 1517 approached, the fall of Constantinople and the attacks of the Turks all the way through the Balkans, combined with the bitter rivalry of Francis I of France against the incipient Hapsburg dynasty of Charles V who controlled the former Burgundian estates in the low countries, all of Austria and Hungary and was Holy Roman Emperor, had inherited Spain and its discoveries, and was a cousin to Catherine of Aragon — married to France's bitter rival Henry VIII the king of England, kept Europe unsettled. The spread of printing fanned fires of discussion — and were easily turned to dissent and conflict. Church authority was no longer capable of holding things together — despite the grace of God still at work in the world.

The Eruption of the Reformation

Students of church history well recall that Luther claimed that we are not sanctified internally but merely covered over, like a pile of manure that looks beautiful in the snow but is still rotten inside. His rejection of church practices other than "Sola fides, Sola gratia, Sola scriptura" smacked strongly of Wycliffe's positions, but could not be contained by secular authorities in conjunction with church leadership.

[9]Moon Wayland Hayes, *World History*, New York: McMillan Co., 1932, 447.

Historians will also recall that Calvin went a step further and proclaimed that all actions are the work of the omnipotent and sovereign God — who has already predestined us before we were born. Clergy were of little or no use for making a connection with God, for he is with us whenever two or three are gathered in his name (Mt 18:20). A sign of one's predestination might be the favour of God in this world, so those who were prosperous were seen as the most likely to be saved.[10] In countries, and sections of countries, strongly engaged in commerce, this approach seemed much like the way business was done. And if we could not undo or outdo what God had already decided, we might as well enjoy the prosperity right now — especially if it had the hint of salvation as part of its reputation.

Other denominations that developed at that time deviated from the need for clergy even further. The Anabaptists even suggested a delay in baptism, despite the fact that it was plainly mandated in sacred scripture. Sadly, this led to some people never being baptized at all. All these differences inevitably bred conflict, which various political groups and movements took advantage of for their own reasons — including Cardinal Richelieu of France who supported the protestant movement in Germany to keep that rival nation divided and weak.[11]

However, though secular rulers protected these reformers for their own political reasons, the Reformation succeeded because the population of Europe had lost their confidence in the authority of their clergy and the need for them to connect one with God. As we live in a world whose post-modern philosophies consider everything relative, where each person's opinion is as valid as anyone else's and they claim that there is no absolute right or wrong, where there is no absolute standard and people take offense at suggesting one, may God help us navigate today's problems better than we did those of the Reformation as we seek to follow Christ and rely on His grace.

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[10] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge, Hendrickson, 2008, Online at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/

[11] Geoffrey Parker, *Europe in Crisis, 1598–1648*, London: Fontana, 1984, 219.