

Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages
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500th Anniversary

"Here I stand. God help me. Amen." Luther's closing statement at the Assembly of Worms (April 17, 1521). We mark the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 Theses (October 31, 1517), in this special issue of *Beauties of the Truth*.

"Here I Stand"

The Reformation and its Aftermath

In Germany, Wittenberg's nobility still took Medieval pride in their collection of relics from the saints. Fittingly, these were set off in gold and silver artwork and — to maintain the mystery — viewing was permitted only during the great feast day of "All Saints." A small admission fee permitted the faithful to view "a fragment of Noah's ark, some soot from the furnace of the Three Children, a piece of wood from the cradle of Jesus Christ, some hair from the beard of St. Christopher, and nineteen thousand other relics of greater or less value."¹

Midday on October 31, 1517, the day preceding "All Saints," a tonsured Augustinian monk who served as the theology professor at the local university made his way to the church door of Wittenberg castle. There he posted a handwritten document in Latin entitled a "Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences." The "disputation" set forth 95 theses challenging the theology of selling "indulgences" or the church's guarantee of deliverance from sin. Martin Luther was certain that this was bad Catholic theology. If a person was literate, they were literate in Latin, so Luther's challenge was read and devoured with great interest. The literate then translated it for the benefit of bystanders.

Soon the wheels of ecclesiastical discipline began their slow inexorable movement to grind up this most recent challenger. But, the world was changing. Not even seventy years earlier Johannes Guttenberg's printing press had opened the era of mass communication. For papacy, the

time-tested methods for dealing with dissent were to prove unworkable. Within two weeks, copies of the 95 theses were posted all over Germany, within five weeks they arrived at the Vatican. An emerging literate middle class could no longer be controlled by superstition.

As events would unfold, compromise and reconciliation with Rome would prove to be impossible. The scriptural testimony that "the just shall live by faith" (Romans 1:17) was to make a deeper and deeper impact on Luther's belief. Luther was to prove to be remarkable for his morally courageous, articulate, energetic, and unwavering stand for principle in opposition to Rome.

At his trial in Worms on April 17, 1521 Luther, speaking first in German, rather than Latin, stunned the audience by his closing statement: "Unless I am convicted by scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other — my conscience is captive to the word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand. God help me. Amen."

Noblemen, risking their titles, lands, and lives would soon protect, hide, and actively aid Luther in advancing the cause of "Protestantism." What began with an obscure professor's challenge to indulgences ended by changing the face of Europe.

THE ANABAPTISTS

Soon, blood was everywhere. Warfare, pestilence, and poverty became the rule of life. Fearsome executions awaited any, Catholic, Protestant, Anabaptist, and fre-

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quently Jew, who would not conform to the convictions of the local majority. Starting from that fateful day in Wittenberg, 131 years of unrelieved misery reigned in Europe. At long last the Peace of Westphalia (1648) set the modern map of Europe with Catholics and Protestants agreeing to an uneasy truce.

With the broader warfare ended, a full generation of fighting continued within national borders to establish conformity to state worship, be it Protestant or Catholic. John Milton's (1655) poignant elegy mourned the recent, brutal, and horrific Catholic massacre of the followers of Peter Waldo:

“AVENGE, O Lord, thy slaughtered Saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old ...
Their martyred blood and ashes sow ...
That from these may grow a hundredfold, who ...
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.”

The Reformation led to church ransacking and consigning images and reliquaries to flame. Church lands were confiscated. In Protestant lands monasteries and convents were emptied. Like Luther himself, many of their former celibate inmates married and raised families. Luther's marriage to Katharina von Bora, a former nun, left pious adherents of Catholicism mortified.

Though Protestant churches now stood with stark interiors, they were more alive than ever. Christ was now the one mediator between God and man. The sermon, rather than the mass, now served as the focal point for the church service. Luther believed that “the Devil, the originator of sorrowful anxieties and restless troubles, flees before the sound of music almost as much as before the word of God.” In unison, it was the congregation that now sang the modern and soul-inspiring hymns, including Luther's chorale, “A mighty fortress is our God.”

The presses continued their labors. Soon tracts and Bible texts were placed directly into the hands of a thoughtful and increasingly literate citizenry. Wherever Protestantism went, groups emerged earnest to learn only from scripture, without appealing to church authority. This “grass roots” religious movement soon proved unwilling to stop the reforming where Luther did.

Anabaptists were wide-ranging in doctrine, but three issues characterized them. They took exception to church-state union, considering it whoredom. They broke with Luther and Ulrich Zwingli on infant baptism. For Anabaptists, baptism was for those who had: “Received Jesus Christ and wished to have him for Lord, King and Bridegroom, and bind themselves also publicly to him, and in truth submit themselves to him and betroth themselves to him through the covenant of baptism and also give themselves over to him dead and crucified and hence to be at all times subject, in utter zeal, to his will and pleasure” (*The Ordinance of God*, Melchior Hofmann, 1530).



“Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me, Amen.”

A third point of contention was Luther's support for the mass. Here the Anabaptists, Zwingli, and other reformers argued that Christ intended the bread and the wine as symbols, a remembrance, a memorial, and not as a sacrifice. Meeting with Zwingli to dialogue on the mass, Luther moved to the chalkboard writing only, “This is my body.” In his passionate and irascible manner, the force of this effort broke the chalk. For Luther the discussion was ended. Though he disagreed with the Catholic church on transubstantiation, he affirmed the “real presence” of Christ in the mass explaining his position:

“I have often enough asserted that I do not argue whether the wine remains or not. It is enough for me that Christ's blood is present; let it be with the wine as God wills. Sooner than have mere wine with the fanatics, I would agree with the pope that there is only blood” (*Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, 1528).

The Anabaptists focused on Bible study, prophecy, and also studied the tabernacle. Some Anabaptist fellowships in northern Italy, Poland, and Romania even denied the trinity. Nearly one hundred years later, writing on the eve of the thirty years war, one of their highest tributes comes from an implacable enemy:

“Among all the heretical sects which have their origin from Luther ... not a one has a better appearance and greater external holiness than the Anabaptists. Other sects are for the most part riotous, bloodthirsty, and given over to carnal lusts; not so the Anabaptists. They call each other brothers and sisters; they use no profanity nor unkind language; they use no weapons of defense ... they own nothing in private but have everything in common. They do not go to law before judicial courts but bear everything patiently, as they say, in the Holy Spirit. Who should suppose that under this sheep's clothing only ravening wolves are hidden?” (*Of the Cursed Beginnings of the Anabaptists*, Christoph Fischer, 1615).

Accounts of the Reformation such as of Merle d'Aubigné cited earlier (and in *The Time is at Hand*, page 346), focus on fringe groups of Anabaptists and have not a kind word to say. Current historians have criticized the persecutors of these dear brethren.² In a comment upon Zwingli's essay, “Refutation of Baptist Tricks,” the editor writes:³

“In this paper Zwingli show’s himself up in a very bad light. This is no place in which to describe the outrageous treatment which the Anabaptist party received in Zurich and elsewhere through Switzerland. The author feels the freer to use such a term because he is not himself a Baptist, but he comes to the subject merely as a historical student. ... The part which Zwingli played in this wretched business is a serious blot upon his reputation. ... The Baptists were pursued relentlessly; drowning, beheading, burning at the stake, confiscation of property, exile, fines, and other forms of social obloquy were employed to suppress them The fact shows plainly that the persecuting spirit in the times of the Reformation was just as rife among Protestants as among Roman Catholics, and that the devil was abroad in the hearts of those who considered themselves on both sides as the true servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

In the 21st century, the heritage we owe the Anabaptists has not only been reclaimed, but recognized as one of the most significant developments of the Reformation. A current BBC history divides the reformers protesting the Catholic church into two camps — on one side, Luther and Zwingli who saw Christianity encompassing the whole of society. These wished for Christians to control the reigns of political power. On the other side, the Anabaptists who saw the separation of church and state as essential.⁴

QUAKER AND HUGUENOT TESTIMONY

“Bear the cross, and stand faithful to God, then he will give thee an everlasting crown of glory, that shall not be taken from thee. There is no other way that shall prosper than that which holy men of old have walked” (Thomas Loe, Quaker, 1662).

Loe’s preaching in Oxford moved young William Penn to openly criticize the Church of England, leading to Penn’s expulsion from Oxford University. Penn, the son of a British Admiral, left for France and soon found his way to *L’Academie Protestante de Saumur*, a center for Huguenot Protestant learning that briefly flourished in France. This was a consequence of liberal policies in 1598 instituted by the Protestant born and raised Henry IV. Henry wished to make amends for the horrors his predecessor, Charles IX, perpetrated in the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre (1572). Conditions in the world were changing. Though atrocities would follow, a new consciousness was emerging. Huguenots later would be expelled from France (1685), but tearing out heretic’s tongues, nailing them to carts, burning them, drowning them, massacring them, were losing favor as accepted instruments of statecraft.

The air at Saumur was filled with discussion of the prophecies in Daniel and Revelation. Collective opinion held that the

churches of Revelation were progressive and that the church was in the sixth, or *Philadelphia* stage. This point was not lost on Penn later in his life. Huguenot scholar Pierre de Launay (1573-1661) sought to determine when, during the Gothic and Vandal ravages of Rome, it was proper to begin counting the 1260 days of Daniel using the day-for-a-year formula. By far, the most significant scholar of this period was Pierre Jurieu (1637-1713). Writing after the Huguenot expulsion from France in 1686, Jurieu would extend de Launay’s methods, concluding that the Lord’s special judgment would fall on France — the tenth part of the city of Revelation 11:13 — in the decade of 1780-90, and certainly by 1796.

Returning to England, Penn found himself among the Quakers and soon he was arrested for running afoul of the religious laws. The seriousness of the charges kept escalating and eventually his treatise “The Sandy Foundation Shaken” (1668) put him in the Tower of London, the bishop charging blasphemy. Penn had criticized Trinitarian belief as unscriptural and illogical. “[For] what can any man of sense conclude but that here be three distinct infinites” and, “It is manifest then, though I deny the Trinity of Separate Persons in one Godhead, yet consequentially, I do not deny the deity of Jesus Christ.”

CROSS AND CROWN

Penn’s seven months in the tower were spent writing “No Cross-No Crown,” a widely disseminated treatise that fixed the image of the Cross and Crown in the hearts and minds of the Lord’s people from that time forward. Penn’s words are simple, sincere, and scriptural: “What is our cup and cross that we should drink and suffer? They are the denial and offering up of ourselves, by the same spirit, to do or suffer the will of God for His service and glory, which is the true life and obedience of the cross of Jesus” (Chapter 4, Section 4).

Penn reexamined scriptural promises passed over since St. Augustine. Theologians had minimized the importance of the church’s life experiences — Augustine considering these but memories “dissipated like clouds.” Penn recognized that life experiences acquired under unfavorable conditions would be an eternal benefit.

The death of Sir William Penn in 1670 left young Penn in control of the family fortune, including a massive debt owed to his father by the crown. With this financial support, Penn now had the means to pursue his pilgrim ministry nearly full time. He traveled throughout England, Ireland, and along the Rhine River preaching the Quaker doctrine. Recognizing that the crown could never remit the growing debt to his late father, he asked for a colony in payment. His focus on this “holy experiment” of



Statue of William Penn

founding *Sylvania* (the woods), and planning and building its principle city of Philadelphia, would be his best-remembered legacy. Echoes of Saumur ring in the name Philadelphia. When the council approved his request, they insisted his father be honored, and changed the colony name to *Pennsylvania*.

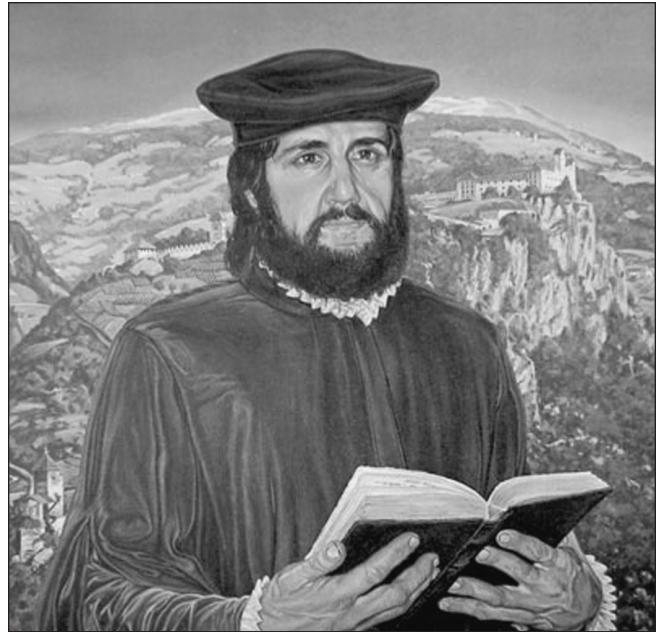
In practical politics William Penn proved highly capable as a lawgiver, mediator, and practical pacifist. On North American soil, his bold unarmed approach to the native-Americans chiefs at the great elm of Shakamaxon caused them to set down their bows and arrows. Penn's governance became legendary. Long after his passing; there still was talk of the Indians' deep mourning over the death of their dear brother to whom they had bound themselves "to live in love." Voltaire, who usually could manage only derisive comments about religion, praised Penn as the greatest lawgiver since Moses. Though the revolution to follow would not be by pacifist means, Penn's hopes were that God would make his colony "the seed of the nation." And so it would prove.

With the religious wars of Europe ended, the following century was one of explosive growth on every front of human inquiry. It was now understood that the earth revolved around the sun, the orbit of the moon was explained, light was explained, and mechanical engines were developed to replace the muscle-power of draught animals. Perplexing math problems unsolved for thousands of years were solved. New musical forms opened unexplored realms for the human spirit. The social well-being of common people became the focus of interest for new sciences seeking to understand social, political, and economic theory. All of this fed the minds of people about a revolution in the social and political order. Importantly, this all impacted religion. With an eye to the recent past, there was a suspicion of all things religious. Agnosticism, deism, and Unitarianism became the preferred expressions of spirituality among society's leaders.

FRANCE AND PHILADELPHIA — 1776-1799

While France was the focal point for much of this effort, it would be pamphlets from France that were to fan the embers of revolution in the American colonies. Following a declaration of independence originating from Philadelphia on July 4, 1776, the American colonies broke from England after five years of fighting. Seizing on this example the revolution came home to France. Heeding cries of "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," it was the common citizens who led a bloody revolution serving notice to monarchs everywhere that their days were numbered. Significantly, reverses occurred. The French revolution also led to the rise of Napoleon.

Napoleon represents a decisive watershed in world history. The world had never before seen anyone quite like him. Like Alexander the Great, Napoleon had a vision not only for conquest, but for remaking the culture of Eur-



Felix Manz, Anabaptist Martyr

ope. The pope's cooperation with the Allies against the French Republic, and the murder of the French attaché, Basseville, at Rome, led to Napoleon's attack on the Papal States. Attempting to export revolution to Rome, the French General Duphot was shot and killed. In response, the French took Rome February 10, 1798. Because the pope refused to submit, he was forcibly taken from Rome on the night of February 20, and brought first to Siena and then to Florence. At the end of March, 1799, though seriously ill, Pius VI was hurried over the Alps. Finally reaching Valence, he succumbed to his sufferings and died.

Entering into a concordant with Pius VII, elected as successor to Pius VI, Napoleon tersely laid out his terms: "For the pope's purposes I am the new Charlemagne ... I expect the pope to accommodate his conduct to my requirements. If he behaves well, I shall make no outward changes; if not, I shall reduce him to the status of Bishop of Rome" (Napoleon, to Pope Pius VII, 1799).

The refusal of Pius VII to acquiesce sufficiently resulted in 14 years of house arrest and his removal from Italy to Fontainebleau. After Napoleon's fall Pius would return to Rome in 1814, but this triumph would prove hollow. For the rest of the century the papacy would see only an unremitting loss of prestige, power, and properties.

None of these epoch-defining events were lost on John Lathrop (1731-1820), a Yale-educated divinity scholar. Lathrop was particularly active in drawing attention back to the prophetic studies of Jurieu who had predicted the French revolution over one hundred years before the event. Lathrop's work recognized the critical importance of Biblical chronology. Soon, William Miller (1824-1863) and others would bring out additional pearls long hidden.

Across a wide ocean, one month before a French mob burned the Bastille (July 14, 1789), Representative John

Adams of the United States looked out from his office in Philadelphia, the first seat of government. Adams knew that the power of religion could be exercised for good or ill. In general, his belief was that it had been exercised for ill, and he strongly supported the separation of church and state. As soon as the constitution for the new nation was ratified (1788), it was immediately criticized as incomplete because it failed to define the human rights protected. The agreement was to draft a “Bill of Rights” to correct this. The opening phrase of the first of ten amendments ratified December 15, 1791 marks a turning point for church and state. For the first time in any nation’s history, freedom of worship was official state policy: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

It had been 265 years since Felix Manz, the first Anabaptist martyr, perished in the “third baptism” under the freezing waters of the Limmat River near Wellenberg, Switzerland. At last the Anabaptist entreaty for the separation of church and state was law. As the 19th century dawned, a culture in Europe and North America holding religious, social, political, and scientific world-views unimagined by Luther held world stage. This fulfills Christ’s promise to the church of Philadelphia, “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it” (Revelation 3:8). In the next century, economic upheaval from a movement soon to be called the “industrial revolution,” and scientific advances, would provide Christianity with its greatest challenges and its greatest triumphs.

— Revised from “*The Reformation and Martin Luther*,”
Herald Magazine, Special History Issue, 2003

(1) d’Aubigné, Merle, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, (1861-1862), Book 1, Chapter 3.

(2) d’Aubigné, *op. cit.*, Book 11, Chapter 10.

(3) Jackson, Samuel Macauley, *Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) Selected Works*, Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia (1972), page 125.

(4) Naphy, William G., *The Protestant Revolution*, BBC Books (2007), page 49.

The Papal Millennium

THE MILLENNIUM IN JEWISH BELIEF

On Pentecost Sunday the apostle Peter spoke of the Times of Restitution, as a season of blessing and refreshment (Acts 3:19-21). For his Jewish audience he was presenting a familiar belief that held the 6,000 years from creation would be followed by a special 1,000 year Sabbath “day.” This belief goes back to before the destruction of the second temple in 70 AD.¹ Eusebius the church historian attributes millennial (1,000 year) preaching as **standard Jewish belief** that now was superseded by church hierarchy’s claimed spiritual understanding. In this “superseding” Eusebius was wrong.

Eusebius, who did not believe in the Millennium, records the “heresy” of: “Nepos a bishop in Egypt ... [who] taught that the promises given to the holy men in *the scriptures should be understood more as the Jews understood them*, and supposed there would be a certain millennium of sensual luxury on this earth ... he asserts there will be an earthly reign of Christ” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 7:23).²

What a difference the political misfortunes suffered by the Jewish community in Diaspora would make!

Three hundred years later, the Jewish position was completely reversed. Rabbi Abaye (died 339 AD) lived outside the reach of Rome. His writings are preserved in the Babylonian Talmud. Rather than a period of blessing, Abaye citing Hosea 6:2 envisioned 2,000 years of desolation. By the mid 19th century, Rabbi Kattina, citing Isaiah 2:11, would write: “Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate, as it is written, ‘And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day’ ” (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 97a³).

The slow recovery of the most ancient Jewish tradition promising blessings has come with the fresh energy from the re-establishment of Israel and the recapture of Jerusalem. One 21st century Jewish reframing posits:⁴

“The final era, in which we presently find ourselves, is bounded by the years 4,000 to 6,000 — 240 CE to 2240 CE. It has so far included what one may certainly view as the prophetically predicted “birth pangs of the Messiah.” Perhaps the three prayers of Shabbat, identified as Tur — the Shabbat of Creation, the Shabbat of Sinai, and the *Shabbat of the World to Come* [emphasis added] — are meant to correspond to the three eras of history preceding the seventh millennium.” After reviewing the horrors of the 20th century Jewish Holocaust and then the elation of the founding of Israel, Rabbi Blech continues, “we are not yet at the end of history ... [this] is a beginning that portends the complete fulfillment of all our prayers.”⁵

THE MILLENNIUM IN CHRISTIAN TEACHING

For the Jews, one final war with Rome (132-135) ended in disaster. At the same time, the church leaders focused on the heavenly promises of to the church only. *Any concept of an earthly kingdom was now heresy*. The words of Jesus to Pilate were upon the lips of the church, “My kingdom is not of this world.” With time, Christian belief mixed with Greek philosophy would decry a “sensual” and “carnal” earthly kingdom.

The first explicit setting forth that the 6,000 years from creation is to be followed by a 1,000 year millennium of blessing comes from the epistle attributed to the compassionate disciple Barnabas. This writing holds to many clear apostolic teachings. For example, there is no hint of Jesus as “God the son.” Nevertheless, it appears to have been authored by a Gentile Christian writing in the name of Barnabas (though some of the editorial board believe it was by Barnabas, the companion of St. Paul).

Augustine

City of God, Book 20:23 — What Daniel Predicted Regarding the Persecution of Antichrist, the Judgment of God, and the Kingdom of the Saints.

“Daniel prophesies of the last judgment in such a way as to indicate that Antichrist shall first come, and to carry on his description to the eternal reign of the saints. For when in prophetic vision he had seen four beasts, signifying four kingdoms, and the fourth conquered by a certain king, who is recognized as Antichrist, and after this the eternal kingdom of the Son of man, that is to say, of Christ, he says, My spirit was terrified, I Daniel in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me, etc. Some have interpreted these four kingdoms as signifying those of the Assyrians, Persians, Macedonians, and Romans. They who desire to understand the fitness of this interpretation may read Jerome’s book on Daniel, which is written with a sufficiency of care and erudition. But he who reads this passage, even half asleep, cannot fail to see that the kingdom of Antichrist shall fiercely, though for a short time, assail the Church before the last judgment of God shall introduce the eternal reign of the saints.”

“God made in six days the work of his hands; and he finished them on the seventh day, and he rested the seventh day and sanctified it. Consider, my children, what that signifies, he finished them in six days. The meaning of it is this: that in six thousand years God will bring all things to an end. For with him one day is a thousand years; as he himself testifies saying, ‘Behold this day shall be as a thousand years.’ Therefore, children, in six days, that is, in six thousand years, shall all things be accomplished. And what is that he says; and he rested the seventh day: he means this; that when his son shall come, and abolish the season of the Wicked One, and judge the ungodly; and shall change the sun and the moon, and the stars; and he shall rest gloriously in the seventh day” (Epistle of Barnabas 15:3-6).⁶

If the date of the millennium was to be established, from the outset it was clear that the widely read Greek Septuagint Old Testament set forth a markedly different chronology from the Hebrew Masoretic text. In 303, Eusebius, author of the *Ecclesiastical History*, compiled the chronology of the Chaldeans, Assyrians, Medes, Lydians, Persians, Hebrews, Egyptians, and Greeks, plus listings of the Greek Olympiads, the rulers of the Greek city-states, the Macedonians, and the Romans.

Eusebius was engaged in a scholarly exercise to align history. As his earlier comments against Nepos demonstrate, he was not motivated to use chronology as

a tool to predict the millennium. He was opposed to such beliefs. Of special importance, buried in all the tables of Eusebius’s chronicles, he included one Septuagint-based calculation that pointed to the year of the birth of our Lord as 5199 AM (“Year of the World,” *Anno Mundi* in Latin).

Church hierarchy opposition to the notion of a millennium continued and grew. Eusebius wrote against Cerinthus who was active around the time of the writing of Barnabas: “Cerinthus, by means of revelations which he pretended were written by a great apostle, also falsely pretended to wonderful things, as if they were showed him by angels, asserting, that after the resurrection there would be an earthly kingdom of Christ, and that the flesh, i.e. men, again inhabiting Jerusalem, would be subject to desires and pleasures. Being also an enemy to the divine Scriptures, with a view to deceive men, he said that there would be a space of a thousand years for celebrating nuptial festivals ... For one of the doctrines that he taught was, that Christ would have an earthly kingdom” (*Ecclesiastical History*, Book 3:28).

AUGUSTINE AND ANTICHRIST

Until the Reformation, the voice of Augustine would dominate the Latin medieval worldview.⁷ Unknown to him, his focus on Antichrist would lay the groundwork for dissent within the church and the eventual recovery of belief in the millennium. Augustine (354-430), bishop of Hippo in present day Tunisia, wrote the *City of God* (*Civitas Dei*) in response to pagan charges that Christianity was to blame for Rome’s fall in 410:

“The *City of God* has been described as the most important book for the understanding of western Christendom after the Bible, an opinion which gains support in part from the medieval manuscript tradition, as nearly 400 copies and fragments of the text survive from the period between the fifth and fifteenth centuries.”⁸

These four hundred copies of selections from *City of God*’s nearly half million words were the product of a time when both parchment and scribes who could handwrite were very precious and rare. Through Augustine one line of prophetic interpretation still shone in the darkness. He emphatically taught that after the fall of Rome, Antichrist would arise. In keeping the prophecies of Antichrist alive, *City of God* was to create difficulties for the medieval church and state that increased with time:⁹

“For what does he [Paul] mean by ‘For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now holdeth, let him hold until he be taken out of the way: and then shall the wicked be revealed?’ [2 Thessalonians 2] I frankly confess I do not know what he means. ... However, it is not absurd to believe that these words of the apostle, ‘Only he who now holdeth, let him hold until he be taken out of the way,’ refer to the Roman empire, as if it were said, ‘Only he who now reigneth, let him reign until he be taken out of the way.’ ‘And then shall the wicked be revealed:’ no

one doubts that this means Antichrist” (Augustine, *City of God*, Book 20:19).

Augustine’s exposition of these Antichrist prophecies was an embarrassment to the Catholic Church. While he was one of their most esteemed teachers, his writings needed to be censored. My copy of *The City of God* from a Catholic Press with a proper Imprimatur from Francis Cardinal Spellman, Archbishop of New York removed 27 of 30 chapters from Book 20 — including the two chapters cited here.¹⁰ Augustine incorrectly taught that the hoped for “short” persecution of Antichrist would be 1260 literal days and not 1260 literal years of Antichrist’s war against the saints of the most high (Daniel 7:21).

THE PROBLEM OF CHARLEMAGNE

Accepting Eusebius’ Septuagint-based calculation that placed the birth of Christ at 5199 AM would set the year 800 AD as the first year of the millennium. St. Jerome (378) adopted this then-distant date. During the period 400-600 AD twelve writers followed Jerome and Eusebius.¹¹ Both St. Jerome and St. Augustine warned of Antichrist’s persecution as the world would come to an end. Despite the church’s downplaying the importance of watching for the close of the 6,000 years, there was a continuing interest in when this might be. The encyclopedia of Isidore of Seville (614) is usually credited with the final popularization of the Septuagint chronology pointing to the year 800 as the first year of the millennium. Another ten writers followed Isidore’s lead.¹²

The year 800 AD was to be one of the most momentous in European history. On Christmas Day, December 25, the year 799 AD had closed (Christmas was considered New Year’s Day, hence this was the first day of 800 AD.) The coronation of Charlemagne as the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire took place at old St. Peter’s basilica in Rome. An insightful account of this coronation which here we quote at length is given by Prof. Peter Wilson:¹³

“In December 795 Leo III notified Charlemagne of his election as pope, a favor normally reserved for the Byzantine emperor. Nonetheless, contingency rather than systematic planning characterized the next five years leading to Charlemagne’s coronation.



Coins such as this aroused public sentiment against the Pope. The image of a devil emerges when the coin is inverted. The Latin phrase translates as, “From a bad crow, a bad egg.”

Three aspects stand out. First, the Empire was a joint creation of Charlemagne and Leo III, ‘one of the shiftiest occupants of the throne of St. Peter.’ Accused of perjury and adultery, Leo was unable to assert authority over the Roman clans, who orchestrated a mob which attacked him in April 799, nearly cutting out his eyes and tongue — acts of mutilation considered to render the victim unfit for office. Already at his accession, Leo had sent Charlemagne a banner and the keys to St. Peter’s tomb, symbolically placing papacy under Frankish protection. Charlemagne was reluctant to assume this responsibility, which could require him to judge and remove a wayward pontiff.

A generation later, the Frankish chronicler Einhard claimed Leo sprang the idea of an imperial coronation when Charlemagne finally visited Rome in November 800. We should not be misled by this typical hagiographic device stressing Charlemagne’s supposed modesty in not seeking worldly ambition. The details were agreed in advance and carefully choreographed, with the participants fully aware they were taking a significant step. Leo rode 12 miles from Rome to meet Charlemagne, double the usual distance accorded a mere king. The ambassador from the patriarch of Jerusalem was on hand to present the keys to the Holy Sepulcher. Although the actual site was in Arab possession since 636, this act symbolized Charlemagne’s assumption of the ancient Roman mission of protecting Christianity. Finally, the choice of Christmas Day 800 for the coronation was deliberate. This was not only a central Christian holy day, but that year fell on a Sunday and was believed to be exactly 6,000 years since the Creation.”

John of Modena, born in 738, penned the following passage, at the conclusion of his copy of the Chronicle of Isidore as the year 800 came:

“From ... the birth of my poor and unhappy person ... [to] the most Christian and pious Lord Charlemagne, king of the Franks and the Lombards in Italy, there are 62 years. From the creation of Adam until the present year ... there are 6000 years.”¹⁴ A contemporary chronicle which mentions the arrival of the year 6000 AM during the year of Charlemagne’s coronation is the *Annales Augiensis*, noting simply “ad an. 800: 6000 ab initio mundi” (“AD year 800: 6000 from the beginning of the world”).¹⁵ More than 685 years later, Isidore’s system of chronology was still in use amongst the Catholic Portuguese.¹⁶

Thus, the Holy Roman Empire state and the Roman Catholic church began their millennium in 800 with an epoch-defining event of European history. In 1799 this church-state millennium would end. A new vision of government, a state without the church, would be forced upon Europe by the new and energized French Republic.

AFTER THE CATHOLIC MILLENNIUM

Today, Richard Landes, a Catholic scholar, maintains that the overall response of the Latin church was to quietly abandon the Septuagint and to set forth the Hebrew

Masoretic text as the most accurate transmission of the word of God. This set the problem of 6000 AM more than a thousand years into the future from Charlemagne:¹⁷

“Few Christian teachings more directly concerned and excited the commoners than chiliasm [editor note: “chiliasm” means belief in the millennium], with its promise of a time of heavenly peace, dreamlike prosperity here on earth, and a justly ferocious punishment for sinners, particularly those who had abused their power by oppressing the poor and defenseless. Chiliasm has, therefore, always had a distinctly subversive political character, and ruling groups invariably oppose it, often violently wiping out any traces.”

If the enthusiasm for the momentous 6000 AM was restrained, it is because careful readers of Jerome and Augustine now had three troubling questions to consider:

First, as long as Byzantium (Rome) was even nominally involved in granting titles to the Popes and kings in Western Europe, the Roman Empire could still be said not to have fallen. This irrespective of reality — in the coronation of Charlemagne, the break with Byzantium was clear. The reign of Charlemagne often marks the beginning of the Middle Ages, where all outward appearance of the refinements of Roman civilization were lost.¹⁸ However, it was essential that the title of Roman Empire be used. If Rome was gone — the worrisome prophecies of Daniel were due for fulfillment. Antichrist was to follow. Was the Holy Roman Empire really Rome?

Second, there was the nagging problem of setting prophetic events in proper order. Antichrist was to arise and persecute the church before the “eternal reign of the saints” which sounded like the millennium. Now after 800 it was the 7th millennium and the church and state were firmly in control. What happened to the prophecies of Antichrist?

Third, if the millennium of blessing was now in progress, how could the church countenance persons like Pope Leo III, who had an abysmal moral reputation? The accusations about Charlemagne’s moral reputation were also abysmal. While current sensibilities might be shocked that Charlemagne had five legitimate wives and five concubines, the church tolerated this.¹⁹ However, Charlemagne had some proclivities so sinful that even the church shuddered.²⁰ Was this what the church should expect of the eternal reign of the saints?

All of these concerns would cause a thoughtful Christian reflection, but in those evil times, the only safe course would be to keep one’s head bowed in prayer. Low murmurs against the Papal Millennium and the Pope as Antichrist would continue. They would become more insistent and widespread as the centuries rolled on, the abuses of church authority would become more flagrant and deadly, in the end even the flawed church invention of “purgatory” for souls not really good enough for heaven would be turned into a mockery by the selling

of indulgences. All of this would culminate with Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses on the door of Wittenberg church 500 years ago.

— Br. Richard Doctor

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(12) Landes, R., *op. cit.*, authors pointing to the beginning of the millennium as 800 AD following Isidore of Seville and the years of their writing are: Fredegar (642), Merov. genealogy, Florentinus, Ambros. H, Paris BN, Vat. reg. 294 (673), Bodlian 113 (675), Berne 219 (699), BL add., Berne 611 (727).

(13) Wilson, Peter H., *Heart of Europe, A History of the Holy Roman Empire*, The Belnap Press of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (2016), page 26.

(14) Landes, R., *op. cit.*, page 197.

(15) Landes, R., *op. cit.*, page 198, footnote 235.

(16) Grafton, A., “Dating History: The Renaissance & the Reformation of Chronology,” *Daedalus*, Volume 132, Number 2, (2003), page 74.

(17) Landes, R., “The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography, Medieval and Modern,” *Speculum*, Volume 75, Number 1 (Jan. 2000), pages 97-145.

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