

INTRODUCTION

Chapter One

A STORY TOO LITTLE KNOWN

Telling their story was part of the way of life God gave to ancient Israel. Parents were to recount to their children and grandchildren what he had done for his people in a previous generation (eg Exod 10:2; Deut 4:9). In such Psalms as 78 and 105-107 the Israelite people recited basic elements of their early history. All this was to help them understand who they were, and observe the terms of their unique covenant with the Lord. The story of their nation and the story of their religious life were one and the same, of course: they didn't separate sacred from secular¹, as we tend to.

There was a time too, not so long ago, when we used to tell our story. As a young naval officer, newly come to faith (in 1971), several of those who disciplined me were diligent to teach me the Christian story of my nation as well as what the Bible had to say. That kind of thing is rare now, and life for believers the poorer for it. These days a lot of Christian leaders wouldn't have a sufficient grasp of either the history of the Church or the story of their nation to be able to teach them to others. To be fair, these accounts I'm referring to – of the Church's and nation's past – were often more myth (the story we wanted to tell about ourselves) than history. The British national myth, as communicated to me from childhood onwards, wherever I learned it, was too often about our privileged past and our superiority over other, lesser peoples (!). Quite apart from this, I was to discover in adulthood, each part of the Church had its own myth too. Partly the story was told to maintain a strong sense of identity for whichever group we

¹ Although they did separate 'holy' from 'non-holy' (eg Gen 2:3; Ex 3:5; Lev 5:15) – which wasn't at all the same thing. This sacred/secular distinction has been very important in Western history.

happened to belong to (in my case, the Protestant evangelicals). Partly it was told in an attempt to disqualify other groups (in particular I was warned of the dangers of Catholicism and theological liberalism).

It's good we've stopped offering myth in place of history – particularly to the extent that myth served to spread untruths about others. But we could, and should, have substituted history for myth, not just stopped telling the story. By history, I mean the fairest, most accurate account a person or group can manage to put together of 'the way it happened'². John Dawson, a pioneer of global reconciliation ministry, has pointed out that 'Israel isn't the exception to all the rules. Israel is the demonstration of the rules.' To the extent that this is true – and it isn't without qualification – telling the Church's story and our nation's story (and relating them to each other) is important for all the Lord's people.

In the Introduction to his book on the British Isles, *The Isles: A History*, Norman Davies speaks of the disastrous state of the teaching of history in England and Wales: 'A generation had been raised without any basic historical awareness. And a society unaware of its history is like a person suffering from amnesia. It simply cannot function efficiently.'³ In the Introduction to his *The Lion Concise Book of Christian Thought*, Tony Lane says: 'We need to read about the past in order to *understand the present*. People without a grasp of history are like a man without a memory. Many of the current beliefs in our society are properly grasped only when we see how they have emerged. A knowledge of history will help us to understand better both ourselves and those with whom we might disagree. We also need to read about the past in order to *escape the present*.'⁴ Roger Mitchell, a leader in global reconciliation ministry, has observed: "The gap between what is and what ought to be is accounted for by what has happened in the past." To do anything about this past, of course, we have to know about it and understand

² There are significant theoretical problems with the concept of history as 'the way it happened' – but it's an appropriate enough idea here.

³ 2000; London; Pan Macmillan; ISBN 0 333 69283 7; p xxvii.

⁴ His italics. 1984; Tring; Lion Publishing; ISBN 0 85648 505 5; p7.

it. For me the issue is best summed up by the Chinese proverb: 'He who doesn't know the village he's come from will never find the village he's going to.'

Our Roman background

My interest in the first part of this chapter is to sketch the impact of Rome on the Western world. To understand Rome's role is basic to understanding the West's story, and seeing why things are as they are in the West today.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE Europe and the West began life in the civilisation that grew up around the Mediterranean 2,500 and more years ago. The decisive event seems to have occurred in 212 BC, during the Second Punic War⁵. This was the fall of the port stronghold of Syracuse in Sicily, greatest of all Greek colonies⁶. The Phoenicians, at this time, were the masters of the sea. For Carthage, which was seeking to halt Roman expansion, Syracuse was key to the supply lines to their general Hannibal, who had all but conquered Italy. The attacking Roman force of some 25,000 men, 100 warships, and many siege engines, found itself frustrated, in effect, by one man: the genius inventor Archimedes. Competent though Marcellus, the Roman leader, was, he had no answer to the arsenal of defensive devices Archimedes was designing inside Syracuse – which his fellow citizens would then manufacture and deploy. But someone within the fortress – believing the day of reckoning was only being put off, and wanting to save his skin – opened the gates of the city to the Romans. Archimedes, unrecognised for who he was, died in the subsequent assault – apparently as he was busy working out some problem. 'Such was the impact when Greek civilization met Roman power,' comments Norman Davies.

⁵ Round two of the epic struggle between the Italian city of Rome and the African city of Carthage; the latter being a Phoenician (Canaanite) colony of Tyre and Sidon. The term 'Punic' comes from the Latin for Phoenician.

⁶ Here I'm following Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*, 1997; London; Pimlico (Random House); ISBN 0-7126-6633-8; pp139-147.

The Romans, who had had no naval tradition before the First Punic War, soon became masters of the sea themselves. That brought mainland Greece – which until then had been oriented more towards East than West – into Rome’s orbit⁷. The Romans were militarily superior to, and more effective politically than, the Greeks. But the Greeks had a richer and more extensive culture, which had already impacted Rome and would do so more profoundly still. ‘The Romans conquered us (by force of arms), but we conquered them (culturally)’, was the Greek attitude. There was truth in this – and the Romans knew it. Roman intellectuals were fascinated by the Greek world, and increasingly embraced its learning and literature. So a Romano-Greek world came into being; but one that functioned under Roman military and political control.

Christ was born into, and grew up in, an area under considerable Greek and Roman influence, cultural as well as political – especially in Galilee⁸. In due course Christianity – of a somewhat compromised kind – would become the prevailing belief system of the (Romano-Greek) Roman Empire. That Empire stretched northward to the Rhine and Danube rivers, and to Hadrian’s Wall across in Britain. In the East it extended to Syria, Judea and Arabia, just beyond the far end of the Mediterranean. It also controlled Egypt and North Africa.

A STATE CHURCH In the beginning, the Church seemed to be just another Jewish sect; and in many ways was regarded as such. Even so, it attracted persecution from the authorities comparatively early. It grew steadily, and became increasingly influential. But it was one cult or sect among many in the Empire. By the time of the Emperor Diocletian at the end of the 200s AD, it could be seen as a threat to the existence of Rome itself – because, as a result of the Church’s influence, the gods on whose favour Rome’s wellbeing was believed to depend were not being honoured as Diocletian and others believed they needed to be.

⁷ Southern Italy and eastern Sicily – *Magna Graecia* – had been colonised by the Greeks, so Rome had been used to having Greek neighbours.

⁸ It’s a very interesting question whether Jesus spoke Greek as well as Aramaic.

This persecuting emperor was succeeded, in effect, by Constantine, who believed that the God of the Christians gave victory in battle, and strongly favoured the Church. He didn't go so far as to make Christianity the state religion, but his actions and policies prepared the way for successors who would do precisely that. By the late 300s paganism was being aggressively suppressed, and adherence to mainstream (i.e. Catholic or Orthodox) Christianity virtually enforced. This transformed Christianity, of course – mostly for the worse.

In parallel with this, however, in the deserts of Egypt and Palestine, a very different Christianity was developing: what we know as monasticism. As well as hermits, others who would come to form communities of monks headed for the wilderness in search of authentic spiritual life. There was an element of escaping from the worldliness of ordinary life in this, but it was much more a desire to leave everything else behind and become single-minded disciples of Christ. “If you want to be perfect,” the Lord had said, “go, sell your possessions and give to the poor ... Then come, follow me” (Matt 19:21). The activity the monks joined him in was fighting demons in the desert – first the demons that assailed them in their own lives (in imitation of his own temptations), and then the demonic forces which acted on the world around them. And they came to gain great spiritual power, and to exercise considerable influence on both the Church and the world. This radical tendency, monasticism, spread all over the Empire and exerted a force which challenged complacent and worldly Christendom-type Christianity – so making the Church much healthier than it would have been otherwise. After the Western, Latin-speaking Roman Empire collapsed around the mid-400s, the monasteries started to provide a large proportion of the key leadership for the Church. Since the Church, in turn, provided essential leadership and educational resources for the new nations in process of formation, the monasteries, to a large extent, created what we now know as Europe. Of this, more later.

THE CONTINUATION OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE As it turned out, the Western Roman Empire changed form rather than simply disappeared. In very difficult times, church leaders acted with great courage and wisdom, consequently saving not only Christianity but civilisation as well. The Catholic Church, centred on Rome, took upon itself the mantle – and, in many ways, the responsibilities – of the old Roman Empire in the West. Something happened, too, that mightn't have been predicted. The hordes of 'barbarians' – mostly Germanic peoples – now sweeping south and west across the old borders of the Empire turned out not to be quite so barbarian after all. They didn't want to destroy Roman ways and Roman civilisation (*Romanitas*): they wanted these things for themselves. In this way, although not at all smoothly, the Western world continued to be Roman (and more Roman, at this point, than Greco-Roman⁹). Meanwhile, the Roman Empire proper carried on pretty much as normal in its Eastern part, based on Constantinople¹⁰. Its language was Greek, and its version of Christianity a variant of the Catholicism centred on Rome: what we now know as Eastern Orthodoxy. This Christian Roman Empire in the East came to be known as the Byzantine Empire¹¹. We can date to the day when it collapsed: 29 May 1453, when the Muslim Turks overran Constantinople. But some historians – Arnold Toynbee, for instance – have defined Byzantium more as a civilisation than a state. If we accept this, then the Eastern Roman Empire lived on in the lives of such (Orthodox) nations as Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece. As late as 1917, Russia had at her head a Tsar (or Czar) – a Caesar.

In the West, the Popes in Rome during the 700s were under increasing pressure from the Lombards who had invaded Italy from the north. They turned for help to the Franks (another Germanic people) – in what is now France and the part of Germany bordering France – who were only too willing to assist them. Charles

⁹ I use the normal term, Greco-Roman for the culture the West inherited, but Romano-Greek for the way the Roman Empire was (overall) – because the Roman-ness was there before the Greek influence.

¹⁰ Istanbul.

¹¹ Constantinople had been built on the site of a small town called Byzantium.

Martel, leader of the Franks, had not only defeated an (Islamic) Arab invasion of France at Tours in 732, but had provided steady support for Boniface, 'the Apostle of Germany', who with the Pope's commission had established a mission to the East Saxons (German Saxons). Martel's capable son Pepin 'carried on the good work' (from the papal point of view). So did Pepin's still more gifted son Charles the Great (Charlemagne). On Christmas Day 800, with or without prior arrangement, Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne 'Most pious Augustus, crowned by God, the great and peace-giving Emperor' – despite the fact that the legitimate Roman Emperor was the one who lived in Constantinople. (We can see who's seeking to be 'top dog' here, who takes the initiative: the Pope; what he does: make a Roman Emperor; and who it is, ultimately and in a unique way, that acts through the Pope's human actions: God [note the words 'crowned by God']! All this will be very important for Europe's future). Although Charlemagne behaved like the Frankish warrior-king he was, soon his personal seal came to bear the words *Renovatio Romani imperii*, 'the renewal of the Roman Empire'; and in a real, if limited, way this was true.

Charlemagne was a true heir to Constantine and his successors: a military man who believed with a passion in the Christian cause, and knew how to further it. 'With the end of the crisis of 778', writes J.M. Wallace-Hadrill in *The Barbarian West 400-1000*¹², Charlemagne entered upon the great central period of his career which lasted till 791. This was the time of military conquest and the rapid development of his sense of Christian mission. The two went hand in hand.' Like Constantine, who also believed ultimately in the desirability of peace and stability, he was ruthless as a military man. And his promoting of the Christian cause ranged from the commendable one of commissioning of an accurate, scholarly, standardised version of the Bible, to the disastrous forced conversion of the German Saxons on pain of death¹³.

¹² 1967; London; Hutchinson & Co; ISBN 0 09 021253 3; p96.

¹³ In mitigation two things need to be said: (1) the Saxons had for a long time been habitual aggressors against the Franks; and, (2) Charlemagne was convinced that until they could be parted from their very bloody form of paganism, they would never cease to be a threat. (It

Under those who followed Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Empire descended into near-chaos, until Otto I, ascending the throne in 936, rescued the situation. He created a rather stronger, and much more German (rather than French-German) Empire. This 'Holy Roman Empire of the German People' lasted in one form or another until Napoleon – 'the second Charlemagne', to the French – put an end to it. Then, in the Palace of Versailles, outside Paris, in 1871, after Prussia had defeated France in the Franco-Prussian War, Bismarck created 'the Second Reich (Empire)' by proclaiming William I of Prussia 'Emperor of Germany' – or Kaiser (Caesar). (He couldn't be crowned because the imperial crown was in Vienna, and the government in Vienna wouldn't release it). Defeat for Germany in World War I put paid to the Second Reich. But Adolf Hitler, seeking to reverse that defeat, proclaimed a 'Third Reich' ...

In a recent speech – or diatribe – in South America, Cuban leader Fidel Castro, denouncing the USA, called that nation 'the new Rome'. No hint of his reasoning was given in the article I read reporting this¹⁴. But he was close to the truth, because Europe, which gave birth to the USA, is in important ways the continuation of the Roman Empire. Rome never really ended in either Eastern or Western Europe. Our desire in Europe to construct Greco-Roman style buildings until recently, for example, bears testimony to what we have in our cultural-spiritual-political DNA. So does our Greek-derived education system. The Western world established by the European nations – the most prominent component of which is the USA – clearly shares this DNA, and like the Europe that generated it creates structures that betray this. Why else, for instance, does Washington have a Senate and a Capitol building? Why else an obelisk, the Washington Monument, at its heart (other than to betray its having been corrupted – like Rome, which has many of them – by ancient Egyptian spiritual

wouldn't have occurred to him that paganism could just be given up. Rightly, he would have believed that it can only be replaced by another faith commitment).

¹⁴ Foolishly, I neither kept the article nor even thought to keep a note of it. Only later did its significance strike me.

influences)? The Holy Roman Empire of the German People adopted the Roman eagle as its emblem. The USA has done likewise. Britain has named her warships and naval establishments after such characters from Greek mythology as Leander, Andromeda, and Daedalus. The French named their strategic nuclear missile system Hades, after the Greek underworld or place of the dead. Again, Greek mythology has given names like Atlas, Titan and Apollo that the USA has used for its space launchers and programmes. These things are no mere coincidences. None of this is to suggest that Europe, the USA, or the rest of the West is intrinsically evil – just to say that each has still, in part, the genetic code of Greece and Rome, good and bad. Possibly, too, that the West tends to show these influences at their more enlightened – though certainly not always.

What Castro would doubtless not admit is that the Soviet Union – especially under Stalin – was also a manifestation of the Roman Empire. Historian Norman Davies reckons Stalin ‘is the clearest example in history of a pathological criminal who rose to supreme power through the exercise of his criminal talents. In the *Guinness Book of Records* he holds the top place under “mass murder”.’ Brought up in Georgia, the son of an alcoholic father and a devout, abandoned mother, ‘he was sent to be educated in a Russian Orthodox seminary. He was expelled, but not before he had imbibed the paranoiac nationalism of a Russian Church which, in Georgia, was an alien creed.’¹⁵ Somehow Stalin seemed to be able to concentrate in his regime all the cruelty of which Orthodox, Tsarist Russia had been capable down the centuries. At the same time, under his ruthless rule, methods which would have come naturally to the Romans produced a formidable military-industrial system which made the Soviet Union a force to be reckoned with.

Yet Castro probably would agree that the Nazi Germany, which grew in parallel with Stalinist Russia, was indeed Roman Imperial in its DNA. Hitler – whose story is only too well known – was no more a Kaiser officially than Stalin was a Tsar.

¹⁵ *Europe: A History*, p 959.

They were both, however, building on the least healthy characteristics of their nations' pasts. The Third Reich can be seen for what it was in the dramatic Nuremberg Nazi rallies of the 1930s as much as in the mass bombardment (*blitzkrieg*) of Warsaw, the deadly U-boat war, or the Jewish Holocaust. As regards his actions against the Jews, Hitler (raised a Catholic) said he was only continuing the tradition of his church. In Germany as much as Russia, Rome was living again – Rome at its most showy, most effective, most ruthless and cruel. At the heart of World War 2, I'm suggesting, part of the West's Roman Imperial spiritual inheritance was playing out (among other factors). WW2 was, in effect, part 2 of WW1. WW1 itself, I believe, had been driven by much the same dynamic. In Europe, at least, one major result of this titanic, two-stage contest was the final destruction not only of the Christendom that Rome established – ironically – but of any general adherence to Christianity¹⁶. Prussian (i.e. German) militarism, especially in its Nazi form, and Stalin's Soviet Union show Rome's evil side to a degree that's hard to comprehend.

The last manifestation of the Roman influence in the West I want to mention is something that may strike you as simply a good thing – and in many ways it is. Part of Rome's genius was her ability to create law codes. We inherit that. The problem with law is that it's designed to control. For Rome, control was of the essence – from the Emperor downwards. Life in the Roman Empire was never stable and secure. Control – as ruthless as need be – was employed to deal with its chronic instability and insecurity. Particularly in Europe, whether it's our national parliaments or the European Union, our legislatures, governments, and government bureaucracies have increasingly become rules-and-regulations factories. For instance, the tax regulations in the UK are so complex and change so frequently that the Inland Revenue staff can't keep up with them. Ridiculous, but evidence of rule-making become a disease. Church life suffers extensively from control and rule-making too. One might expect Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, which grew up in the Roman Empire, to suffer from these –

¹⁶ Although this took a few years to become apparent.

as they do. But Protestantism and modern evangelicalism have been similarly afflicted. It doesn't matter how 'new', 'free', and Holy-Spirit-inspired the latest kind of church claims to be, control and rules soon take over. So do tradition – 'this is the way we do it here' – and liturgy – 'this is our form of worship (even though we don't like to admit we have one)'¹⁷: 'you need to do it our way'. Yet more evidence of Roman influence ...

There's been an experiment under way in London, involving the removal of all signs, markings, and pavements from Exhibition Road in South Kensington. Continental Europe has had this kind of thing for some time, but for us it's been new. Apparently, making a road 'more dangerous' makes it safer – because all road users have to think for themselves rather than being told what to do. This is confusing only to those of us schooled in the Roman tradition, which (like tribal traditions) tells us what to do in almost any circumstance. There are also experiments in doing church being conducted, here and elsewhere in the West, which are known generically as 'emerging church' – and very exciting some of them are too. For emerging church, the reality of the Lord, his Kingdom, and the shared life of believers (true fellowship) is what matters. Forget the old rules, traditions, and structures – and concentrate on the things that matter. So, for instance, Sunday isn't necessarily 'the big day'; indeed, the group may not even meet on Sundays. But some very wise and godly pastors are significantly concerned about this approach to 'church'. My suspicion is, though: it just doesn't conform closely enough to our Roman way of thinking and doing things for them to be comfortable with it. But here I have to confess that one of my favourite scriptures is Gal 5:1: 'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free ...'

During the 1300s, a highly educated Greek Orthodox Christian called Barlaam, impressed by both Church and society in Rome, converted to Catholicism. He

¹⁷ I'm not being negative about tradition, pattern and habit here. They're basic to human life. But we need to acknowledge these, and manage them, so they remain a healthy and helpful influence in our lives – above all so that they don't counter the Holy Spirit's work.

appreciated the sense of order, and the fact that everything seemed to have its proper place – which contrasted with the confusion, as he saw it, in the Greek world he came from. This is what he wrote:

The whole people is ruled by laws. Even the smallest matters are subject to regulation and orderly administration. All ranks of society are taught how to behave towards each other. They know how sins are punished and good deeds rewarded and conduct examined: all these things and everything else that is useful for preserving society in peace is defined and guarded by law.¹⁸

John Wimber, the late leader of the international Vineyard fellowship of churches, used to observe, when teaching on ‘power evangelism’, that we Christians in the West read 1Cor 14:40 (AV): ‘Let all things be done, **decently and in order**’, whereas he thought Paul really meant: ‘**Let all things be done**, decently and in order’. Whether that’s fair or not, he had a point. We in the West are very tied up with rules and order – and can upset others to the extent that we leave behind the rules-and-order mentality. It’s interesting to observe kids today: they’re confident and free in a way we never were when I grew up.

Christianity and the Western World

THE GOSPEL IN EUROPE Europe received the faith early. Did ‘the visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism)’ at Pentecost, Acts 2:10,11, establish a Christian community there when they got home? It seems likely enough. After a while, the gospel spread strongly in Europe, as it had done around the Eastern Mediterranean. First in the Greek-speaking East, but then in the Latin-speaking West, the Christian faith was nurtured and developed. At the Reformation the faith was fought over by the Catholic and Protestant parts of the European Church. If this was inevitable – for reasons that should become apparent later in the book – it was also immensely damaging to the Christian

¹⁸ Quoted, R.W. Southern, *Western Society and Church in the Middle Ages*; 1970; Harmondsworth, UK; Penguin; no ISBN; p81.

cause in the West in the long run. Later, Europeans took the gospel to the nations. But even as they did so, Europe was in the process of losing the faith. Today Europe – and most of the West with it (the US being the big exception) – is substantially post-Christian. Despite many encouraging developments on the Christian scene across the West, Western Christianity, in its public aspect, looks to be in terminal decline. The end of a significant place for Christianity in the West is by no means inevitable, but the outlook for the foreseeable future is dire. Many churchgoers in the West simply reconcile themselves to Christianity functioning at the margins of life: religious observance as a purely private matter. A rather smaller number look for the Lord to reverse the situation in a mighty revival of faith. Even were ‘revival’ to come – and it may – nothing less than the costly business of re-evangelising the West effectively from scratch is going to do the job, ultimately. The damage done to the cause of the gospel during the Christendom era has been so great that we have to start the Western Christian enterprise again (even over the ruins of the old order).

CHRISTENDOM For some time now the West has gone *Post-Modern*, we’re told. This term can be – and is – defined in a variety of ways. The most important thing it means, however, is that we’re past the era known as *Modern*. The *Modern* period was the time when people believed that what was true could be discovered by science – and that what couldn’t be discovered and demonstrated by science wasn’t true (e.g. religion). But now, in our *Post-Modern* era, there’s a radical scepticism about whether there’s any absolute truth to be known in the first place; or, if there is, whether there’d be any way of knowing we’d discovered it. *Post-Modernism* recognises no overall story for the universe – no ‘metanarrative’ – not even a scientific one. What’s true for you isn’t necessarily true for me. (We can’t live on that basis, of course, but that’s where our civilisation has got to). The two most important things to be said about this are that: (a) our age is in fact only partially *Post-Modernist*; and, (b) all we really have a grasp of is what its predecessor, the *Modern* age, was like.

Much more important is the idea that we're now *Post-Christendom*. The social revolution of the 1960s marked the end of a *Christendom* age that had lasted from 312, when Constantine entered Rome, became sole Emperor in the Western end of the Roman Empire, and made Christianity the favoured religion. 1,600+ years is a long time. We know a lot about *Christendom*. We have yet to get much perspective, though, on what *Post-Christendom* really is. The best way to assess it – perhaps the only way, as of now, to assess it – is to examine what *Christendom* was like; just as in the case of the *Post-Modern* period following the *Modern* one.

OUR PREDICAMENT Arguably, the greatest difficulty we Christians in the West face is understanding what's going on. Clearly we face a massive problem of some sort. But how can you set about solving a problem you can't adequately grasp or define? In my lifetime, a lot of answers have been offered to the challenges we face – many of them by people from other nations. For instance: mass evangelism for bringing people to faith (Billy Graham - USA); baptism in the Holy Spirit (various Charismatic ministries – mainly USA); power evangelism (John Wimber – USA); deliverance ministry (Bill Subritzky – New Zealand); church planting and cell church (various – mainly USA); 'church for the unchurched' (Bill Hybels and Willow Creek – USA); and so on. The Church in my nation would be hard pressed ever to thank the Church in the United States adequately for all the good things we've received from it. Even so, there's been a fundamental difficulty associated with all we've been offered: the USA is still in important ways a *Christendom* nation, but the rest of us in the West are very much *Post-Christendom*. The good things they offer us tend to make things work better in a *Christendom* environment – which we don't have any longer. The Americans have both helped us slow the decline in our Christian inheritance and given us new resources which have allowed us to launch the long fight-back.

Now the Lord is sending us Christians from nations that have been little impacted by *Christendom*: Nigerians, Brazilians, Ugandans, Chinese, and many

more (though, sadly, the Christianity they've received from the West has been tainted by it). They make costly sacrifices to help us (in areas of Kingdom life where we can't help ourselves), and we are wise to bless what they do and team up with them. Such friends and partners come into our world having known at home only what we might call *Pre-Christendom*. The solutions they've discovered are designed to address the needs thrown up in the *Pre-Christendom* environment they've come from – not our own. These solutions can offer us a degree of help where what is offered from the USA, and elsewhere in the West, doesn't really address our *Post-Christendom* situation. But *Post-Christendom* isn't at all the same as *Pre-Christendom*. The latter was the situation the early Church knew. Sixteen centuries and more of *Christendom*, overlaid on 300 years of *Pre-Christendom*, don't leave you the same as you were before it came. *Post-Christendom* poses two basic challenges to us Western believers: (a) negatively, to undo the extensive damage of our *Christendom* past; and (b) positively, to make disciples of a particular breed of human beings: those who inhabit *Post-Christendom*. The new ways we've been taught by others since World War 2 have only partially addressed our predicament – because they haven't been developed from a position of understanding it.

EUROPE Following Norman Davies, I've suggested that the birth of Europe can be dated to the fall of Syracuse in 212 BC. But Europe as a continent is a comparatively recent concept. The idea of a 'continent' seems to have arisen out of Renaissance learning (in the 1300s and 1400s), and the global exploration and mapping that went with that. The term started to be used – in the English language, at least – at around the time of the Reformation (1500s). Up until this time, our self-understanding in what we now call Europe was that we were part of the Christian World (like Muslims think of themselves collectively as the Islamic World), or of 'the Church'. And before that, we'd thought of ourselves as part of the Roman Empire that, in turn, had taken over the civilisation that existed in various forms around the Mediterranean.

It's often been said that Europe – in geographical terms – is only a peninsula at the western end of Asia. This, though true, rather misses the point. It was Europe – as this part of the world was becoming – that mapped the planet, divided it into continents, named those continents (see Gen 2:19, 20 for the significance of naming), and put longitude and latitude lines on the world map. This is global overlordship! 'Asia', as a concept, has only derived whatever meaning it has from being given that name by Europe.

For the ancient Greeks, 'Asia' had been what they called the land to the east of them, Africa the land to the south (across the Mediterranean) and Europa the land to the west. They had some concept of the shape of their part of the planet, but there's no evidence they thought remotely in terms of continents – and so of 'Europe'. What was significant, though, was that – as human beings do – they saw themselves as the reference point that mattered. Europe, in due course, would inherit this way of looking at the world.

Following the Reformation, Western Christendom – which had been reasonably much a unity – became divided. After the religious-political conflict of the 1600s on the European mainland – the Thirty Years War – had ended inconclusively, even the Catholic Church recognised that monolithic Western Christendom ('Christendom' in the sense of the united Christian community in the West¹⁹), as it had been, was gone for ever. (Christendom in its first form had already finally separated, East from West, early in the second millennium). During the Enlightenment period – of re-thinking the world – that followed, 'Europe' started to be used as a term by which the Western European nations became known. It was Napoleon – amongst so much else, a populariser of Enlightenment ideas – who brought the term 'Europe' into common usage: as a secular term.

THE WEST The West beyond Europe is Western Europe's life projected into the rest of the world. Not every part of the world impacted by Western Europe

¹⁹ A different usage of the term from the one above.

became Western, however (e.g. India or China). The West, as such, outside Europe, was formed where successful European colonisation took place.

The ancient Greeks had been great colonisers. They needed to be: mainland Greece couldn't sustain the population it was producing. Colonisation worked very well for them. Greece was made up of (reasonably) autonomous city-states, and it was these city-states which established colonies. Cultural and religious uniformity – voluntary and not imposed – served to give the dispersed Greek world a remarkable unity. Absent from Greek colonisation, though, was any sense of empire: of projected power, control or exploitation.

It would be the Macedonian, Alexander the Great, who would introduce imperial ambitions into European life. He wasn't considered properly Greek at all. Alexander believed that the world need to be united under one beneficent ruler – and that he was the man for the job. The amount he achieved, militarily and politically, in his short life (356-323 BC) is hard to credit. Inevitably, as Rome grew more powerful, her leaders and historians saw his as the example to match. Ruling imperially mattered more to Rome than benefiting the human race, even if Rome knew how to be enlightened. The Roman writer Horace, contemporary with Caesar Augustus (Octavian) and a friend, equated territorial expansion with national honour in his advice to the Emperor, whilst another writer, Virgil, also contemporary and a friend, 'urged on Augustus a duty of civilising the world, first through force and then through the Romanisation of conquered peoples.'²⁰ Luke writes in his gospel (2:1, rendered literally): 'Now it came to pass in those days that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the inhabited world should be subjected to a census.' Are we meant to pick up an implicit Roman claim here to authority over the whole world? Later, when Constantine's new capital for the Empire was dedicated (AD 330), rulership of the whole world was

²⁰ David Shotter; *Rome and her Empire*; London; Longman (Pearson Education); ISBN 0 582 32816 0; p216.

explicitly asserted for him, if not by him. If Rome never actually attempted world domination, this may only be because it was never remotely feasible.

The Crusades, called by Pope Urban II in 1095, when he called on the knights of Christendom to 'liberate' Jerusalem from the Muslims, proved that Western Europe had inherited Rome's imperial spirit. J.M. Roberts in *A History of Europe* says of crusading psychology: 'the roots of a mentality which, when secularized, would energise a world-conquering culture, lay in the crusades.'²¹ For Europe, colonisation and imperialism would be all but synonymous when the time came; and 'once contact had been made with distant islands,' says Norman Davies, 'Europeans sailed overseas in ever-increasing numbers. They sailed for reasons of trade, of loot, of conquest, and increasingly of religion.'²² The history of European imperialism has been 'a mixture of blessing and oppressing', as Roger Mitchell has put it. We took valuable things to the nations, such as modern civilisation (much of which is intrinsically good) and – above all – the gospel; we even created nation states such as Brazil and India, the United States (as they would become) and Australia. Europe also exported trouble – the Atlantic slave trade is but one example²³ – and damaged the peoples we overcame. The Belgian treatment of Congo would be among the worst examples of this, but there are many others to disturb one.

Apart from the fact that 'hurt people hurt people' – so that past hurts tend to produce, in consequence, unwelcome present manifestations – the non-European West and the non-Western world have had injected into them by Europe some of the less helpful, even some of the quite disturbing, characteristics of (Greece and) Rome. Europe is the parent family-of-nations of the modern world. If the world doesn't always want to recognise this, it does tend to admit as much in unguarded moments. The biggest negative in what the rest of the world has received from Europe concerns the tainted gospel. The gospel is

²¹ 1996; Oxford; Helicon Publishing; ISBN 1-85986-178-4; p150.

²² Ibid pp 510-511.

²³ The troubled state of black urban culture in the USA today, e.g., is related to this.

inevitably transmitted in a cultural package. To the extent that any culture is tainted, the taint in it will contaminate the gospel within which it's transmitted. When Christians, such as the Pilgrim Fathers, left Europe for North America, they wanted to establish healthy forms of church. The unhappy early history of the Church in the USA shows that this is easier said than done. Unknowingly, the early settlers had carried Rome (and Greece) with them across the Atlantic, along with the gospel. ('It took the Lord 40 days to take Israel out of Egypt. It took him 40 years to take Egypt out of Israel'). The Roman genetic inheritance has been as deeply embedded in the Church in the USA as in Europe's Church (though in a somewhat different way). So, for instance, when the Pentecostal healing evangelists from the USA took the gospel in its Pentecostal form to Africa after World War 2, it went with all the old Roman baggage (which, of course, matches well with basic elements of African tribal tradition). What I'm wanting to say here is this: if the parents are sick, they'll almost inevitably transmit sickness to the kids. And, to the extent that the parents are sick, the whole family's likely to be sick. Europe is 'the parents' here. Europe's first-generation kids – e.g. the Americans, Brazilians, and Australians – have become the next-generation parents. So fixing Spain, Belgium, Germany and Britain (say) – first generation – and Canada, Argentina, the USA and Brazil (say) – second – is vital for both the global Church and the general health of the modern world ('the global village').

On a rather different note, but sticking with the theme of how culture affects the gospel, consider the following, from Dick Halverson, chaplain of the United States Senate:

Christianity started out in Palestine as a fellowship
Then it moved to Greece and became a philosophy
Then it went to Rome and became an institution
Then it went to Europe and became a government
Finally it came to America where we made it an enterprise.

Over-simplified, considerably, this – but not all that far from the truth. What's missing are the ideas that in Europe we fought one another to the death over what Christianity really was; and then, when fighting produced no decisive result, leaders increasingly (and as they were able to) did what was right in their own eyes and fragmented the Christian community. Hence what the Americans then did with it.

To bring the story up to the present, I'm introducing prophetic material from friends whose giftedness as prophets is widely recognised. Prophecy can be more useful in assessing the current situation than even penetrating studies in 'current affairs'.

Two Prophecies for Today ...

Both of the prophecies I want to reproduce here come from the Ugandan apostle and pastor, John Mulinde.

PROPHECY FOR EUROPE This is actually embedded in (and so part of) a prophecy for Britain. Perhaps, if you're not a Brit, you'll excuse the UK focus²⁴:

I saw the map of the continent of Europe and as I looked, there came out of this map a big pillar of smoke. It was a tall, thick and dark pillar of heavy black fumes as from a factory chimney. The fumes rose up very slowly and gradually began spreading out.

From the pillar came a thin mist and it began spreading out almost imperceptibly, but within a short time it had formed a dark film over the entire continent of Europe. As the mist grew thicker, the features below it blurred and became difficult to distinguish under the film of black fumes.

Then, suddenly, I saw a small light spring out from within the isles of the UK. It grew rapidly with finger-like rays of light spreading out in all directions. The rays of the south spread out wider and with longer beams than the rest and cut across the

²⁴ Taken from the version in Charlie Cleverly, *The Discipline of Intimacy*, 2002; Eastbourne; Kingsway; ISBN 1 84291 049 3; Appendix 2, pp222-3. (I commend the book to you).

European mainland. For some time they disappeared into the thick black cloud rising and spreading over the rest of Europe; then they broke through and re-appeared from within the fumes. They spread out even further, touching the entire African continent, eastwards across North and South America. Then the picture disappeared and in its place came a scripture:

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord is upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. [Is 60:1-3, NIV]

Lift up thine eyes round about thee, and see: they all gather themselves together, they come to thee: thy sons shall come from far, and thy daughters be nursed at thy side.

Then thou shalt see, and flow together, and thine heart shall fear, and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be converted unto thee, the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee. [Is 60:4-5, AV]

A thick darkness is rising over the continent of Europe. It is going to grow in intensity and will soon cover the whole of the continent and on to the rest of the world. It is a force of evil. Wherever it will gain full control over any land, it will turn the hearts of the people totally away from God. They will hate anything to do with God, with righteousness or indeed with any goodness. Sanity will be cast overboard, and people will call good evil and evil good. They will desire to give vent to the basest animal passions in them and will look for wilder and wilder ways of doing this. They will enjoy evil and will love all others who enjoy it.

The light is my power of renewal soon to be released upon the land and people of Europe. It will come if my people give themselves wholeheartedly to seeking my face. Its coming will be like a great storm. It will be a mighty power against the darkness and will protect my people from the effect of the invasion of darkness. Wherever the light will break out the darkness shall be neutralised and defeated. But this calls for the co-operation of my people in seeking for it to happen ...'

How exactly this is to be interpreted – beyond its obvious meaning – and how precisely it might relate to the story of Europe and the West up to the present, I'm not sure. For instance, in this picture, what is the nature of the smoke, what is generating the smoke, and how long has this been going on? If a fair amount that

contaminates us in Europe (as around the world) issues from the United States, how does America fit into all this? What kind of seeking the Lord, what kind of co-operating with him, and what kind of prayer and/or worship in particular are being called for?

If this prophecy is true, it speaks of a very serious situation. The Christian community in the UK, in particular, and Europe, in general, aren't responding with any great urgency to what John has prophesied – for whatever reason. This needs to change.

PROPHECY CONCERNING THE CHURCH AND ITS LEADERSHIP On the night of September 10th 2001, in a hotel room in Seattle, on the western seaboard of the USA, the Lord spoke to John Mulinde, telling him that the world had changed, and that it was time for God's people to be set apart if they are to survive the dangerous days ahead. The following morning the twin towers of the World Trade Center were destroyed. John had been asking the Lord how it was possible today to disciple the nations. This was the answer, in its three parts²⁵:

The world has changed and is continuing to change. The forces in the heavenlies have shifted and the changes will gain speed and rapidity. The time will come when you will not be able to keep pace with the way the world changes. The changes will affect every area of life. They are going to affect the political atmosphere, economic atmosphere, social atmosphere and in all the relationship levels of people worldwide. A time is coming when you will not be able to make any impact at all upon any nation, working in the system you are working in now. A time is coming when the Church will not be able to make any impact with the method it is used to. The Church is going to become so impotent and it is going to die away in many nations.

The world has changed and will keep changing. And the way the Church is operating now, a time will come when you will be ineffective and the world will totally ignore the Church and forget about you. You have got to move away from the methods and systems you have been using.

²⁵ John Mulinde, *Set Apart for God*; 2003; Kampala, Uganda; World Trumpet Mission; no ISBN; pp 8-9,15-17.

So John asked: “Oh God, what must we do then?” The response was immediate: “Set yourself apart for me.” After he had tried to work out – unsuccessfully – what this implied, the Lord spoke to him again:

The world has changed and the issues you are fighting with have changed. Unless you set yourself apart for Me and allow Me to work deeply within you, you will not stand in the days ahead. The battle is changing and the enemy forces are raising standards. Set yourself apart for Me. I will work deeply within you and give you authority over the nations. I will cause people to be attracted by the light of your life. I will raise you above the things that hinder and limit you today. I will do My own work through the yielded vessel of your life.

The next morning, the lady who came to the hotel to take him to the recording studio²⁶ told him what had been happening in New York. Some time later, back in his hotel room, he was marvelling at the heroic, selfless work of the rescuers – particularly the fire officer who called his wife on the phone and said he didn’t know if he was going to make it out of the building, but if he didn’t, let her always remember that he loved her and enjoyed being married to her. The man didn’t make it. As John wondered about this, the Lord said:

They are not doing that today because they chose to this morning. Those men who lost their lives as they tried to save others did not decide to be so selfless just this morning of the terrorist tragedy. They are doing it because, many years ago, they chose that profession. They prepared themselves to handle crises like the ones caused by the attacks. They disciplined themselves through long periods of rigorous training. They set themselves apart for such a time as this. Others may not be able to go into that kind of situation, but those people can because long ago they chose a profession that would mean dealing with this kind of crisis ... Set yourself apart. Allow Me to work deeply in you. Allow Me to do things you cannot do for yourself, so that when the moment of need comes, you will be able to stand and help others ... Allow Me to separate you from the things that hinder you, keeping you from being all that I desire you to be. Allow Me to work deeply in your life, that I may deposit My own ability within you. And allow Me to bring you to the place of authority, where you

²⁶ To record a contribution on the principles of ‘transformation’ for George Otis Jnr and the Sentinel Group

will be able to break through those obstacles you see in the nations ... This is My call to My people worldwide ... Tell the people that if they will be set apart, I will work in their lives to prepare them for the days ahead. And I will give them authority over the nations ...

John realised, as he watched replays of the planes hitting the buildings, that the hijackers, like the firefighters, had prepared themselves for what they did. 'Their lives had been set apart for a mission. All those years as they prepared, they knew they were going to give their lives one day for their cause, and they didn't draw back. Those were evil men, but when they followed the principle of being set apart, they accomplished their goals.'

Over the following days, the Lord showed him in the Scriptures how those who had fulfilled the call on their lives had followed this principle of being set apart. Such people as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, the Nazirites, Samuel, Daniel and his friends, John the Baptist, and Paul.

... And a Prophetic Commentary

Wolfgang and Mercy Simson are an apostolic couple, a German married to an Indian, living in Germany. They²⁷ offered the following in Friday Fax Issue 2 dated 14 Jan 2005. I believe it complements John Mulinde's prophecies recorded above:

GOD'S TWO TSUNAMIS

2004 ended with a bang. On 26th December, St Stephen's Day, the day on which Christians remember Stephen, their first martyr, hundreds of thousands of people died in the tsunami. On the same day in 1939, some 30,000 people died in Turkey, and 41,000 in Bam, Iran, on the same day in 2003.

²⁷ Wolfgang is best known for his radical book *Houses That Change The World: The Return of the House Churches*; 1998; Carlisle, UK; OM Publishing (Paternoster); 1-85078-365-X. (An important contribution to a vital debate about the nature of church).

The Bible has no concept of a God unknowing and disinterested in the happenings in the world, so God is not only informed about this tsunami, He explicitly allowed it. Instead of just being shocked, donating or participating in the aid in some way, there is also a question which we must answer: if God allowed the tsunami, what does that tell us? And how should we react? The post-modern answer, that it is an unfair and incomprehensible act of judgement against the Indonesian Muslims, Indian Hindus, Sri Lankan Buddhists and pleasure-seeking tourists, is way too cheap and simplistic. God is saying something very deep to every one of us. My wife's family lives less than a mile from Madras' tsunami-hit coast ...

Personally, we don't know whether we should cry more for the dead or the survivors. Who can grasp the enormity of the situation? Which technology could have prevented this destruction? The tsunami is a foretaste of our ability to stand before God when He comes in His anger; there is no escape. We must ask ourselves: "What prompted God to react in such anger?" Christians have been preaching the chocolate side of God for centuries, which is just what people want to hear. But God is also a consuming fire, the hammer which smashes stone, a double-edged sword, jealous, and a father who disciplines those He loves. What have we, His people done, that He could not restrain His anger? How did we escape judgement this time? And why?

A TSUNAMI OF GRACE AND JUDGEMENT

1st Corinthians 15 teaches us that nature is a mirror of the supernatural: "However, the spiritual did not come first, but the natural, then the spiritual." For years, many prophets have been speaking of two coming tsunamis: one of judgement, the other of grace. On the one hand, God is shaking everything which can be shaken, with water playing a major role (Habakkuk 3). This is the dismaying, cleansing and judging aspect, in which everything built on human instead of Godly foundations is shaken to the bone. On the other hand, a harvest of truly biblical proportions is building up around the world, and if you look carefully, you can already see it sprouting and blossoming. God is watering it.

We can see clear parallels between the natural tsunami on 26th December and the spiritual tsunami, which is having a similar effect on Christianity:

Natural Tsunami

Foundations are washed away.

Spiritual Tsunami

Traditions and structures are shaken to the

	core.
Security is gone.	Financial disaster is hitting large churches and mission circles.
Houses and large buildings washed away.	Individuals and churches washed away by every wind of teaching.
Dead bodies everywhere.	High percentage of youth, Pastors' wives, Pastors & leaders have given up.
Destroyed shops.	Empty leaders that rely on others to lead and provide nourishment.
Wave of orphans.	Spiritual orphans, the Out-of-Church Christian phenomenon.
The Poor suffer most.	Rich middle and upper class Christians overlook the 'Poor Brother'.
The tourists have the microphone.	The Western nations and their agenda dominate Christian news.
Corruption often prevents help to the most needy.	Pseudo-Christian empire building takes large cuts of the funds.
Military spending: \$900 billion p.a.; disaster relief: \$1 billion p.a..	98% of Christian funds flow into self-preservation, 2% into mission.
Lack of coordination in relief work.	Lack of unity, everyone does as he pleases.

According to the Bible, judgement always starts 'in the House of the Lord'. And we seize and judge those who earnestly warn us; if Jeremiah were alive today we would have thrown him into the well! We have done enormous damage to the House of the Lord and His sheep. We are headed on a totally Godless course. It is because of us that Godlessness is spreading like a fungus in our nations. We have turned our back on our Creator. For whom, then, should we weep? For the dead, or for the survivors?

What is this tsunami saying to Christianity, to a libertarian church which graciously accepts God as Saviour, but effectively rejects Him as Lord and King? A rebellious, idol-worshipping and completely un-Christian Christianity protests loudly against the mere suggestion that an absolute God is a judge. It stands up and proclaims "No more war!", and if it would not appear so laughable, would angrily shout "No more earthquakes! No more tsunamis!" in God's face. There's only one message for this 'Christianity': "Repent!"

WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?

God is giving everyone a historic opportunity to repent and rebuild, renew their foundations, rebuild the ruins, re-lay the tracks and re-open the blocked wells. Our chance lies in radical repentance, personally re-establishing Biblical principles in our own lives, and taking part in probably the last reformation and harvest in history.

SO WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

1. Wake up and build His Kingdom – united and co-ordinated;
2. Show people the Rock. What remains, when the ground beneath your feet is shaking? The Living God is the only hope;
3. Explain the water masses: judgement and grace, cleansing and watering.
4. Seek His face. Let's do everything we can, pleading with God to turn His face to us, and not His back.
5. Scream out to Him for our own deliverance. We Christians must ask God to judge us with His double-edged sword, and set us free from our selfish jails.

[Further information at www.simsonwolfgang.de/html/welcome.html.]