

# *The Past 2000 Years*

Having already written extensively on what I have called ‘the seeming work of God’ during the period from Pentecost to the rise of the Separatists,<sup>1</sup> and having already said something about it in this book, in this chapter I will sketch only the briefest of outlines of the past two millennia, marking out what, in light of what we have so far discovered, I see as the significant turning points in the history. I stress that what follows is only a brief outline of a very complicated story.<sup>2</sup> I am speaking of Christendom’s Rise, Christendom’s Reign, Christendom Tinkered With, Christendom’s Flourishing, and Christendom’s Demise. In particular, I have the West in mind.

## *Christendom’s Rise*

I speak of Christendom. What do I mean by it? I am referring to what happened in the time of the Fathers (roughly the second to the fifth centuries). By ‘the Fathers’, I mean those theological politicians who adulterated the new covenant, the *ekklēsia*, in particular, by making the old covenant the norm and pattern for the new, thus directly contradicting Christ’s teaching in his parable of the wineskins (Matt. 9:16-17) and the events at the Passover meal in the upper room (John 13 – 17).<sup>3</sup> They also adopted pagan ideas into their system. In short, I am speaking of those men who replaced the new-covenant revelation with a Judaised-paganised Christianity, supplanting the dominant and vital role of the Spirit with a legal religion. This took a fatal turn when the Roman emperors got involved. Under Diocletian (284-305), believers had suffered horrendous persecution, but with the so-called conversion of Constantine (324-337), followed by the reign of Theodosius I (379-392; 392-395),

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<sup>1</sup> See my *Battle*.

<sup>2</sup> For far more, see Stuart Murray: *Post-Christendom*, Paternoster, Carlisle, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> See my *The Upper Room*.

Christianity (patristic-style) became the State Religion of the Empire. The political/religious conglomerate known as Christendom had been formed.<sup>4</sup> A Judaised-paganised Christianity, enforced by Roman law, had now become the norm.<sup>5</sup> Dissension spelled ‘heresy’.

Let me summarise some of the consequences of Christendom within the *ekklēsia*: the establishment or confirmation of the laity/clergy split, the imposition of a hierarchy, the virtual elimination of the priesthood of all believers – replacing it with priestcraft, the absolute dominance of the monologue sermon – sacramentalism, sacerdotalism, the vicious persecution of nonconformist believers,<sup>6</sup> infant sprinkling with baptismal regeneration, the erection of sacred buildings, and the like. Disastrous!

More was to come, and quickly! Within a very short time, this formation of Christendom led to the emergence of the Bishop of Rome as the top dog of the religious half of the monstrosity. As for the political supremo, that depended on the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms in the various states where Christendom inexorably spread its grasping tentacles. But two masters in one house was always bound to be unstable. And so it proved: the bitter tension was endlessly played out as the Pope and the King (or Emperor) fought for mastery; first one, then the other, held the whip hand. Meanwhile the vast majority of the *hoi polloi* were born, lived (existed) and died in abject

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<sup>4</sup> See my *The Pastor; Infant; Battle*; Appendix 1 ‘Christendom’ in my *Relationship*.

<sup>5</sup> See Appendix 4.

<sup>6</sup> I do not use the term here in the narrow sense of the 15th-century Separatists and others who refused to conform to the Church of England. I am speaking of those who refuse allegiance to the institutions of Christendom. In the early days, the Donatists; later, the Albigenses and Waldensians, Lollards and Hussites, Anabaptists, and so on. See E.H. Broadbent: *The Pilgrim Church*, Pickering and Inglis, London, 1935; Leonard Verduin: *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren*, The Paternoster Press, Exeter, 1964; reprinted, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1980.

darkness and delusion, ‘comforted’ only by the thought that their sprinkling as a baby by a duly ordained priest, and the mystical ministrations of that priest throughout their life and beyond, would get them ‘right with God’. Or so they vainly hoped, trusting that what their priests told them was the truth.

### ***Christendom’s Reign***

I am speaking of the Dark Ages (roughly 500-1500). I do not use this term to give the impression that there was no progress in terms of scientific invention, education, mathematics, astronomy and the like. Of course not. But spiritually speaking, the term is an apt description of the time. Christendom ruled: in the West, Roman Christendom ruled; in the East, Greek (with a subdivision, Russian). And the delusion and darkness of the general population continued unabated as priestcraft maintained its iron grip. Voices of protest were raised.<sup>7</sup> But...

### ***Christendom Tinkered With***

Although there were earlier protestors against the widespread Christendom-corruption, it was only in the early 16th-century that Martin Luther, with his ninety-five theses at Wittenberg, really kick-started the Reformation. The outcome of that stupendous upheaval was a huge split in Christendom. From that time on, Western Christendom was divided into Roman Christendom and Reformed (Evangelical) Christendom.<sup>8</sup> Some radicals – mainly Anabaptists – tried to break free of the shackles of Christendom, and as a result, were forced to face cruel Christendom-persecution from both wings, the Roman and the Reformed. The upshot was that Christendom continued in its two forms – Roman and Reformed – with what seemed a minuscule minority of believers who rejected the monstrosity’s claims. As for the overall effect of the Reformation, while the

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<sup>7</sup> See the ‘The Long Night’ in my *New-Covenant Articles Volume Six*.

<sup>8</sup> What about Lutheranism? In many respects, Luther did not really break from Rome, and the subsequent history of Lutheranism bears this out.

Reformed wing certainly recovered scriptural ground on soteriology, alas, it left Christendom intact as far as the *ekklēsia* was concerned; infant baptism retained its dominant grip, and although presbytercraft replaced priestcraft, the Reformation left the fundamental clergy/laity structure unaltered. As John Milton put it, the new presbyter was simply the old priest ‘writ large’. The ‘faithful’ were still largely spectators who attended ‘a place of worship’ – that is, ‘went to church’ – at specified ‘times of worship’, where they watched and heard, not a priest offering a sacrifice (as they continued to do in Roman Christendom), but a minister preaching a sermon. In both branches of Western Christendom, Reformed as well as Roman, the so-called laity remained a lower order than the clergy; it was the clergy who continued to pull the levers of power as they performed – I use the word advisedly – their appointed duties. I am not saying no good was done in the years which followed the Reformation, but the Reformation did not annihilate all the evils of Christendom. Far from it! Some Christendom-distortions of the new covenant were actually entrenched!<sup>9</sup>

### ***Christendom’s Flourishing***

In the years following the Reformation, one feature stands out. It almost goes without saying that false teachers and their teaching have never abated during all these long years since Pentecost, but the issue I want to highlight now is the way in which believers – for many years – have been so conditioned to regard Christendom as the biblical norm that they have been prepared to adopt Christendom-principles<sup>10</sup> and, on that basis, modify – ‘re-engineer’ is the buzz word – the *ekklēsia* to fit what has become the overriding aim: to adjust the *ekklēsia* and the gospel it preaches to meet the whims of pagans in order to attract those pagans into church attendance. It goes without

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<sup>9</sup> For Stephen K.Ray’s taunts, see Ray pp43-49.

<sup>10</sup> Fundamentally, that believers – including evangelicals, not just Rome – have tacitly accept the concept of ‘development’. See the earlier notes on Newman.

saying that, since the Reformation, apart from the early Separatists, and a few radicals who have erupted from time to time, getting unbelievers to attend a place of preaching and listen to a sermon has been the staple means of evangelism – both evangelical, in general, and Reformed, in particular.<sup>11</sup> But this past fifty years, this has gone into over-drive. As I say, the *ekklēsia* has been so modified that its number-one priority is rapidly becoming the attraction of pagans into church attendance. Consequently, the *ekklēsia* has adopted the features of being just another global business, a virtual market-place.<sup>12</sup> As a result, the *ekklēsia* (sadly, even among Separatists) is becoming a mixed regenerate and unregenerate multitude, where the scriptural separation of the *ekklēsia* and the world has all but broken down.<sup>13</sup> Take the Lord's supper. The concept of 'a closed table' is becoming virtually unknown – certainly, unappreciated, unwelcome – in evangelical circles. The Lord's supper is commonly part of the public work of the *ekklēsia*, with scant – if any – serious warning given – this warning, even when it is given, washing over the heads of most; discipline at the supper is rapidly breaking down. The direction of travel for the *ekklēsia* is directly away from its new-covenant norm – secret, private, for the mutual edification of the saints – into a public performance geared to social-media distribution.<sup>14</sup> Christendom has grabbed the internet with both hands. So much so, it will not be long before no believer will be alive

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<sup>11</sup> D.Martyn Lloyd-Jones has had a big contemporary influence in this area. As John Brencher rightly observed, Lloyd-Jones' conviction was 'that evangelism, in effect, was completely tied in to the set-piece sermon and people were expected to attend the services and hear the word' (John Bencher: *Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) and Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism*, Paternoster Press, Carlisle, 2002, p187). In more recent times, however, while 'the set-piece sermon' is still a feature of most 'church services', the modern adjusted-*ekklēsia* offers a far wider selection of attractions, attractions which have a far-wider appeal to pagans.

<sup>12</sup> See my *Attracting*.

<sup>13</sup> Many of my works have been taken up with this theme. See my latest: *The Upper Room*.

<sup>14</sup> See my *Church; Public*.

who knew what Christianity was before the dawn and dominance of the electronic age. Hence my use of ‘flourishing’ in the heading for this section – not the flourishing of the *ekklēsia*, but the flourishing of Christendom-churchianity as it adapts to each new development of the digital means of the dissemination of information. In order to function today, an evangelical church needs a growing band of tech-savvy professionals – whizz-kids – to manage a bewildering array of IT apparatus. Many believers are absolutely hooked on endlessly hearing or watching monologue sermons from their favourite preacher. Little else seems to matter. The concept of the priesthood of all believers is fading – if it has not already faded – into oblivion.

### ***Post-Christendom***

Whole books have been written on post-Christendom.<sup>15</sup> I confine my brief remarks to the UK. I could extend this to include the USA, because from what I hear and read of events across the Atlantic, as I write (early 2024) this presidential-election year provides almost daily evidence of an upsurge of Christendom with, for instance, evangelical talk of Donald Trump as some kind of reincarnation of Cyrus, with the United States as a second Judah. As I see it, these evangelicals are repeating the fundamental Christendom-mistake, and imposing the Old Testament – the old covenant for Israel – on their nation. And this, it goes without saying, runs directly contrary to the principles of the Founding Fathers in establishing the American constitution. For an increasing number of American evangelicals, the separation of Church and State is well down the road to becoming a museum piece.

But I confine my remarks to the UK.

There can be little – if any – doubt that since the 1960s, Christendom has been losing its grip on UK society. I am not

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<sup>15</sup> I have already referred to Stuart Murray: *Post-Christendom*, Paternoster, Carlisle, 2004.

saying Christendom is dead – there’s plenty of it all around us in buildings, State flummery, novels, and the like – but the evidence is far too strong to be gainsaid: Christendom’s grip is weakening. Ignorance of the basic elements of the gospel is common, and growing. ‘Christian-observance’ – however defined – is terminally-weakening across the board.

But I want to make – and stress – a point of the utmost importance: I acknowledge the post-Christendom phenomenon in society, but, contrary to most evangelicals, I actually welcome this. But even if I did not go this far, the issue I want to stress is this: in this book – indeed, in my life and ministry – it is not the state of society which fundamentally bothers me; it is the state of the *ekklēsia*. And this is because it is precisely the concern I find in the post-Pentecost Scriptures. While Christendom is fast losing its grip on UK society, it maintains a velvet-gloved iron-grip on most believers. In ‘Christian circles’, in the thinking of most believers, Christendom is as much alive as ever it was;<sup>16</sup> most evangelicals even inadvertently use the advent of post-Christendom in society to enforce Christendom’s grip on the *ekklēsia*. Perhaps I should put it the other way about: Christendom moves believers to use post-Christendom principles to enforce Christendom on the *ekklēsia*!<sup>17</sup> In other words, things are getting far worse, in a fundamental sense, not better.

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Well, that’s my take on the effect of Christendom. You may not agree. If so, how do you view things? How does your view stack up with Scripture?

And if you broadly agree with what I have set out, you must realise that this leaves us with the question, the decision. In light of the above, what is your verdict? Would you say that the course of the gospel during this age since Pentecost has been

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<sup>16</sup> It is just that most believers don’t recognise it.

<sup>17</sup> Sideline truth, count the popularity, sell the books in quantity, press ‘donate’, bank the bucks.

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one of Triumph or Tragedy? Of course, it's not either/or, black or white. Nevertheless which of the two would best fit the bill?