

Kingdom Report

Week of 1 August 2020

The Reformation and “White Privilege”

The issue of racism has become a world wide discussion. The accusation is that “white privilege” is inherently structural and evil and caused “white” prosperity. Here is my counterargument: It was the Reformation and Bible believers....

Oxford professor Niall Ferguson in one of his many historical books asked the question “Why the west and not the rest?”. Meaning why after the 1600’s did northwest Europe suddenly break out into compound annual economic growth unheard of in 5000 years of human history to far advance beyond any other civilization then in the world? I won’t bother with his answer as he confuses “fruits with roots”. He did mention one of his reasons as “the Protestant work ethic”.

He was almost right, except that most of the world then was working very hard but little to show for it. The answers today from the left and right of the political spectrum is the same...genetic racism of the white race. For the left this is genetic structural inherent white exploitation. For the far right this white genetic superiority. Both are extreme and both are wrong.

The right answer is that in the 1500’s the Reformation preaching and printing of the Bible spread through Europe but only in the 1600’s was actually applied to national life in some countries that produced incredible economic, and scientific advances. And I will say this, the countries of the world, and there are many of all races, who applied these Reformation principles to their government and economic policies all went from peasant poverty to middle class affluence in 40 years.

Let me illustrate from Germany, Holland and England.

By the late 1500’s the city of Geneva had broken away from the Duchy of Savoy to become an independent city-state. They invited the French lawyer John Calvin to come and be the pastor of the city as he had gained fame for writing tracts called his “Institutes” on how to actually run a society on Biblical principles. Key to his teaching was that as scripture says “For he has made us kings and priests” Rev. 1:5. Calvin taught that we are all the “elect” of God to be kings and priests, not just the kings of nations and Bishops of the church who lorded over the peasants with their “divine rights” as elect of God.

So in Geneva they formed a Christian Republic, a people ruled by law, not men, that law if the law of God and it is to be administered by civil justices and over seen by Godly pastors.

Religious refugees flocked to Geneva to see this “Kingdom of God on earth” and the famous Geneva Bible with its margin notes was printed in many languages explaining this new vision of the “ekklesia” of God as a society of God’s people ruled by God’s

laws. From Geneva went missions outreach with this new vision of “God’s government on earth” to Holland, Scotland, England, Germany, France.

In France these “Huguenots” were almost wiped out by Catholic persecution. But in Holland they formed “The Reformed Church”, John Knox left Geneva to Reform Scotland other “Puritans” left for England to Reform the Church of England and the same in Germany with the Pietists.

In Holland the result was that the Reformed Church started a rebellion against the oppression of Emperor Charles V of Spain and his Catholic oppression, they fought hard and gained their independence and formed from 7 provinces the “United Provinces of Holland” and from that moment on with religious freedom and economic freedom that came with it the tiny state of Holland became the richest nation in the world of the entire century of the 1600’s.

In England there is an interesting story.

For the average person of the 1500’s and 1600’s England you were a peasant working the lands of your overlords, the King, the Barons and the Church. 95% of productive wealth came off the land and that land was owned by the overlords. You had no knowledge of the Word of God as that was kept hidden from you by church and state upon pain of death should you ever dare to read the Bible. Most of your life was spent in useless demeaning work on the great estates and when you were not working you were in a drunken stupor.

Everyone drank beer, women and children included. Every household made bread and brewed beer. Breakfast was beer thickened with eggs and poured on bread and then ale for lunch and stout for dinner. The average person including women and children drank the equivalent of almost two six packs of beer a day, and their beer had a higher alcohol content. A sixth of the land was sown in barley and every seventh building was a tavern. The church decreed about a hundred special “holy days” a year which was wasted in further drunkenness. Fetal alcohol syndrome in children of the time produced stunted mental development. But then came the Puritans and coffee and what followed was the scientific and industrial revolution that changed the world.

The Puritans led by the Oliver Cromwell took on King Charles and his army over the issue of rule of law or rule by a King who ruled absolutely by “divine right”. By 1650 the issue was decided with the execution of Charles and the introduction of the Commonwealth. The Puritans with a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other had broken the power of the supposed divine rights of kings and prelates and established the divine right of the common man to rule of law, free speech and private property. What the common man would do with those rights after 1650 was greatly enhanced by the introduction of the first coffee shop in Oxford ...also in 1650. In 1652 there was one coffee shop in London but by 1699 there were more than 2000. In 1675 Charles II tried to ban them without success. Why? Well this is what happened...

The Puritans loved coffee. Alcohol is a depressant, coffee is a stimulant. Instead of wasted days in useless “church holydays” and menial work for the Barons men could now work for themselves on their own terms and their own interests. Instead of men drunk most of the time on alcohol, serious men could discuss serious business over a

good stimulating cup of coffee in a warm coffee house without the distractions of drunken louts shouting and fighting. And discuss they did...

Lloyds Coffeehouse is where men came to negotiate shipping risks and became the insurance giant Lloyds of London. The Baltic Coffeehouse gave rise to the Baltic Shipping Exchange (where you booked cargoes). The Jerusalem Café gave rise to the East India Company. Scientists and artists had their own Café's. Isaac Newton hung out with other scientists at the Grecian Coffeehouse and the writers like Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift frequented Will's Café. Then a man named Jonathan Steel decided to publish a weekly compilation of all the best gossip from each of the Café's represented by a "correspondent's desk" Foreign news came from St. James Coffeehouse and arts and entertainment from White's. He called his weekly the "Tattler" which became the first magazine. Pamphleteers of the time wrote that "coffee and commonwealth came in together...to make a free and sober nation."

This break with the dead weight and drag of the feudalistic system of church and state that wasted men's lives and alcohol that stupefied men into brute behavior allowed a new social, economic and religious reality to emerge. It allowed men of ideas and men of action to emerge. It was the Protestant revolution in England of 1650 that allowed the industrial and scientific revolution to emerge from England after 1650.

This vision of God's people using their freedom and entrepreneurial energy to set the agenda for society while at the same time creating wealth was the story of the Quakers in 1800 England....

book by Deborah Cadbury called "Chocolate Wars" gives a fascinating insight into the origins and impact of the great chocolate makers of England in the early 19th Century. All the great English chocolate dynasties, the Cadbury's, the Rowntree's and Fry's, were Quakers. In early 1800's when Methodists were looked down upon, Quakers were really beyond the pale, they were the "holy rollers" of their day.. They weren't called "Quakers" for nothing but they really loved the Lord and served Him with a passion.

At that time they were banned from careers in government, the church, law or the military. And so that left them only with work in commerce. But even there they refused to do anything to do with alcohol, gambling or armaments. So they got into the food industry, specifically chocolates....and prospered mightily! It is what they did with their wealth that changed the course of history. They showed remarkable compassion to their workers in an age of child labor, abuse of workers and total neglect by government or the state church of the needs of the common worker. Factory conditions were horrendous with no worker rights. These evangelical industrialists changed all that.

- They got children out of the factories and started "Sunday schools" for the workers children so that they could get a basic education.
- They limited the working week and working hours so that workers could have a family life.
- They provided a pension for old retired workers and decent weekly wages for their workers.
- They built decent houses for their workers in the form of entire new towns. The Cadbury's built Bourneville which still stands today as a town.

- When they found out that their chocolate beans were being produced by slave labor they started small worker owned plantations in Ghana.
- And most importantly from a purely business viewpoint, they produced great products at good prices and their constant innovations in the sweets industry beat out the competition and produced profits for their ministry work.

The actions of the evangelicals in early 1800's England shamed the entire nation, Wilberforce in parliament shaming the nation over slavery and the Quakers in commerce over worker rights. It caused a social outcry across the nation that made others demand similar rights and benefits as the workers in the Quaker factories. Social legislation soon followed in Parliament dealing with labor laws, pensions and schooling for children. Europe had to follow and Bismarck in Germany established the first social democracy.

In Germany there is another fascinating result of the Reformation that literally created the soul of the German nation.

Pietism and the Origin of Germanness

There are certain attributes about Germans that have made them admired for their accomplishments the last 300 years. A noted historian thinks he has found the origin of "Germaness"...and therein lies a lesson for discipling the nations into the Kingdom.

I was reading through Peter Watson's (senior editor of the London Sunday Times) epic 850 page "The German Genius". His theme is that in a golden period of about from 1730 to 1930 you have the greatest contribution to the world by a group of people (the Germans) across the widest spectrum of disciplines that literally created the modern world we know today. That would include, mathematics, philosophy, music, engineering (electrical, mechanical, chemical, metallurgical), physics, pharmaceuticals and on and on.

Critical to these range of breakthroughs was not just the theoretical academic achievements of the range and depth of new knowledge added to humanity but the German genius for actually organizing the transformation of new knowledge into new products and producing those products by highly efficient production processes.

But central to his book is the quest at the start for what is it that produced this incredible spurt of human creativity. If "Germaness" can be defined as the prototypical ideas associated with Germans of hard work, study, research, discipline, neatness, order etc. then what was the origin of what we have come to consider "Germaness"?

Here is where it became most interesting for me. For Watson the origin of German greatness was not the usual suspects of Frederick the Great, king of Prussia. He already inherited a great nation from his father King William Frederick. But neither was it the father. Watson along with other German historians (Carl Heinrich's central book "Prussianism and Pietism") considers the Pietist movement (the same as the Puritans in England and America) in Germany from about 1670 onwards as the origin or what we would consider Germanness. Let me quote him:

"But the most important development that came to shape and characterize Prussia...was a new variety of the Christian religion. Germanness as we now understand it emerged in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and cannot be understood without a firm grasp of Pietism" (P. 45)

Watson in his book singles out that one Pietist in Germany that was most responsible for creating the new German identity....

"It was August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) who conceived the form of Pietism that was to transform Prussia.....His (Francke's) own earlier crisis of faith and a "born again" conversion convinced him that the cultivation of the heart, prayer, Bible reading, heartfelt repentance, and daily introspection were the basic ingredients for a truly religious life rather than intellectual sophistication and doctrinal wrangling. He insisted that piety was not to be sought in isolation: to fulfil the biblical injunction to love one's neighbour, one should seek to improve society through practical acts of charity. It was a short step to Francke's view that vocational labour must become the main sphere of activity through which Pietists could serve their fellow citizens."

So what did August Francke do? Well he started Halle University to put his ideas into practical use. And Halle University along with Gottingen University would transform ideas of scholarship and learning that would transform Germany and the world.

At Halle University Francke launched a unique approach. All universities at that time would be teaching mainly theology and philosophy. But Francke introduced a host of vocational subjects so that pupils from Pietist schools could "produce something useful for their neighbours" along with very strict way of life for students that taught them discipline, order and asceticism. He envisaged that the clergy would be the new "teaching estate" that would spread teaching throughout the nation.

What helped Francke in his new vision of practical education was that King Wilhelm had his own religious conversion in 1708 and now required that all new clergy must have spent at least 2 years at Halle University and then the king assigned clergy to all his army units to give his officers education and from there it was decreed that all soldiers children were also to be taught. And that started a national education program.

At the university new methods of teaching were brought in. The idea of the "seminar" was introduced whereby students were expected to present papers for discussion. That started the quest for original research and the idea that students must participate in the process of knowledge creation. And that produced the concept of the PhD. A dissertation by students who produced new research knowledge. Which produced a knowledge explosion.

King Wilhelm introduced a meritocracy standard in all government positions. If you studied and were capable you have a position. The king being a Pietist himself was also an example of austere and simple living. No grand palace of Versailles.

Watson writes:

In this milieu, the bureaucrat became an advocate of a militant ideology dedicated to raising the level of civilian society through education. By 1742 a royal commission reported that no fewer than 1660 schools had been built or repaired...No less important over time the educational improvements brought about by Friedrich

Wilhelm and the Pietists created an entirely new collective mentality: in the words of Walter Dorn the Prussians became "the most highly disciplined people of modern Europe."

This application of the principles of the Reformation and Biblical economics can be applied by any people to any nation and it will produce the same results that is did for Holland, England and Germany after the Reformation. It has nothing to do with race as proven by:

- South Korea moved from abject poverty after Japanese occupation in 1945 to national prosperity by 1985...with no natural resources.
- Singapore moved from dismal swamp of poor people in 1960 to one of the most prosperous nations in the world by 2000...no natural resources.
- Taiwan from 1948 breaking free from communist China to prosperous nation by 1988
- China a billion people in abject poverty under communism and Mao's cultural revolution kicked out communist economic policies in 1978 and by 2017 had brought 600 million people out of poverty to middle class prosperity.
- Israel in 1948 a new nation poor and farming in Kibbutzim and 40 years later a rich and prosperous nation.
- The Japanese in the Meiji Restoration of 1868 went from Feudalism and poverty to world economic power in 40 years. After America kicked out their Neo-feudalistic order after World War 2, the destroyed nation rebuilt itself into prosperity again in 40 years.

If we the people of Southern Africa who are a majority Christian people will follow God's economic laws and civic laws on how to govern our nations we can within 40 years create a thriving Christian civilization.

Or we can just carry on with our current trajectory into an economic abyss of poverty and blame "white monopoly capital" or "structural racism" or any other excuse why not to do things God's way.