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How Christianity Saved Civilization... And Must Do So Again  
New York: Image Books, 2015

### *The Seven Revolutions*

So how can the Church live and serve in this new post-Christian world, in which believers face various forms of persecution? The starting place is to look at the Church as she existed in the pre-Christian world and to look at the seven revolutions, the seven ways in which the Church changed the world, the seven gifts that the Church gave the world, which affected human relationships in ever widening concentric circles.

In the realm of the individual (chapter 2), the Church revolutionized the way society defined personhood. To affirm the universal dignity of human life requires the strong to speak up for and defend the weak, those who can't speak for themselves. For some people in the ancient world, the ability to speak was the very litmus test of humanity. Those who could not speak (babies) and those who could not speak the languages of civilization (the "barbarians," who did not speak Greek or Latin) were considered less than fully human and were denied the benefits of society. One Roman writer said that because they cannot talk, babies were more like vegetables than like human beings. Yet from the very beginning, the Church affirmed the value of all human life and resisted exploitation and dehumanization. Because of Christianity, this way of looking at humanity became so much a part of Western culture that eventually the Constitution of

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the United States would be built on the concept that all people are created equal (though this stipulation would not be applied to everyone at first). Long before the Constitution was applied equally to all people in this country, the Catholic Church had already condemned abortion, the abuse of children, and slavery.

In the realm of the home (chapter 3), the Church revolutionized the way the world saw the family. The foundational value of personhood was applied with equity to women and even to children.<sup>20</sup> And, more importantly, with the development of the Church, the exploitation of all those who lacked support systems was rejected and critiqued. In the realm of what we might call the workplace (chapter 4), Christianity emphasized the dignity of human labor. Based on the assumed value of the individual person, the Church affirmed the honor in manual labor and eventually rid the world of the belief that one person could own another. In the realm of religion (chapter 5), the Church defined herself, and, by extension, religion in general. Christianity redefined what it meant for humanity to connect with the Divine, and in the process, it taught that God is love, and union with God is open to all persons. Thus, the Church recognized, in the course of her struggle to define herself, the importance of inclusiveness and the value of unity.

In the realm of the community (chapter 6), Christians looked outward from the Church and cared for the poor and the sick, regardless of their religion. The concept of Christian

<sup>20</sup> The early Christians took to heart Paul's words in Galatians 3:27-28, rejecting the caste systems of Rome's government and its cults. Though the Church reserves ordination to men, this does not diminish the radical nature of the Church's insistence on the full personhood of every human being. In this book, we are talking about Church membership,

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charity was something alien to the self-centered perspective of Roman culture, yet by the end of the fourth century, Christian charity had replaced Greco-Roman virtue as the goal of human progress.

In the realm of ultimate concerns, Christianity influenced attitudes toward life and death (chapter 7), not to mention belief in the afterlife. And by doing so, Christians further promoted a culture of life. This new culture of life (and eternal life) gave people the hope they desperately needed, which led to the freedom to rise above the daily grind and even to express their God-given creativity through art. Finally, in the realm of the state (chapter 8), the Church revolutionized government. Beginning with Constantine, emperors admitted not only that they were not gods but also that they were not above the law and were morally accountable to God. Although some, like Constantine, considered the postponement of baptism a loophole in the system, the fact that they thought they had to postpone their baptisms to avoid accountability proves the point. There was a higher power, an authority over the emperor, one who had behavioral expectations for the emperor, and one who could remove the emperor from the throne if he did not measure up. With all of these seven revolutions in mind, it is indeed remarkable that the Church, born of oppression in the Roman Empire, would be the entity that brought hope to the world.

It is true that there have been times throughout her history when the Church forgot some of the lessons she had learned—the shadow side of the alliance with empires resulted in the endorsement of the subjugation of native peoples, forced conversions, and other forms of coercion and oppression. But these mistakes only highlight the need for the contemporary Church to reclaim her original convictions.

## *The Church Can Learn from the Church of the Past*

Once we have discussed the seven revolutions in detail, the last two chapters will demonstrate why reclaiming these revolutions is so important for the Church of the twenty-first century. Chapter 9 will take in the big picture, the relevance of the early Church for the Church of the future, and chapter 10 will offer concrete suggestions for taking action in the new post-Christian world.

Christians can influence the world for the better again. But it will mean making a commitment to stand by a worldview that our society often rejects and ridicules. It will mean making a commitment to accept a countercultural position in society, while many who call themselves Christian simply allow themselves to be converted by the culture. It will mean waking up to the reality of cultural persecution (as well as the violent persecution still going on in many countries) and resisting it.

As we have noted, this cultural persecution may be subtle, and it may take the form of pressure from areas as diverse as marketing media, with its temptations toward materialism, and education, with its skepticism about anything spiritual or miraculous. Christians will need to recognize these challenges to traditional faith, call them out, and resist them. We will also need to support one another when we do this, speaking up for our brothers and sisters when they are ridiculed—even if it's just for giving thanks to God when they accept an award or make a touchdown. In this way, the Church of the twenty-first century can overcome the new paganism as the Church of the pre-Christian world overcame the old paganism—that is, by refusing to deny the faith and by being willing to risk our lives (or the comfort of our lifestyles) for something greater.

*Some notes from the text:*

### **Revolution of the Person:**

- Human Dignity: Invention of the Individual
- Caste system
- Protect the weak
- Invention of Human Rights
- Universal charity
- Pagan utility of life
- Pagan abortion and infanticide
- Human life is sacred

### **Revolution in the Home**

- New Idea of family: nuclear family (v. man & his property)
- Pagan pornographic culture
- Adultery normalized
- Pagan childness; encumbrance
- Christians married; had kids
- Marriage as a Sacrament vs. business
- Christian ideal: equal partners (2)

### **Revolution of Work**

- Labor became holy: work is for lower classes
- Slaves: 1/3 of the pagan population
- Pagan organic model
- Pagan leisure as virtue
- Sabbath: rest on the 6<sup>th</sup> day
- Work = participation in God's creation
- Positive: earn a living
- “Ora et labora”

### **Revolution of Religion**

- Monotheism
- Creation of a new church
- New relation with the divine; relational
- Understanding of God as love
- God as Trinity
- Religion v. Magic: transactional
- Pagan worship to appease; fulfill civic duty
- Not just social or individual; more than fulfilling civic duty; balance of personal belief [faith] & social responsibility [works]
- Rejected “live and let live” detachment for conviction good news that needed to be shared
- Church defined: 1) conversion by choice; not by birth (not racial or ethnic); 2) Sacraments valid regardless of minister and recipient status; 3) Church of inclusion thus catholic—universal [rejected pagan exclusivity]; 4) unity of belief ; inclusive to people but exclusive devotionally [doctrine]
- Church a counter-cultural movement; defined herself in opposition to pagan faiths

### **Revolution of Community**

- Pagan: religious but not spiritual; now religion implies standards for everyday behavior; not for pagans
- Doing God's work in the world
- Pelagian controversy result: human cooperation with God to do God's work in the world.
- Morality is other-centered: love your neighbor
- Church rejected: 1) idea was the fault of the poor & deserved so wealthy couldn't ignore them; 2) Pagan giving was to get; Christian was expect nothing in return; 3) hereditary honor, and suicide to escape shame; 4) displays of humiliation/death as forms of entertainment; 5) moral relativism

- Church affirmed: 1) powerful have an obligation to protect the weak; taking care of others outside your group

### **Revolution in Death**

- Body is holy because we are made in image of God & God became man.
- Funeral industry follows Christianity; pagans preferred cremation.
- Riddle of death for pagans, answered by Christians
- Bodily resurrection
- No need to worry about what happens to the body; nothing that can happen will harm our chances of resurrection
- Meanwhile reverence for the bodies of corpses is not pointless: we believe in the communion of saints
- Patronage: patron saints

### **A Revolution of the State**

- Constantine established freedom of religion
- Pagan: natural right to govern; divine right to rule above human laws
- Plato (pagan): wise few create a perfect society
- Church argued 1) people are created equal, 2) the average person is not expendable; 3)all life is sacred; 4) all should be free to follow their conscience are NOT political ideals: they are originally Christian ideas
- Government as Stewardship: rulers served the ruled.
- People must be free—even free to be wrong
- Defined the best government as one that protects human rights