

For many weeks I've had Tom Holland's new book *Dominion* on the top of my 'to read' list. I will get round to it but I tease myself by listening to talks given and subsequently uploaded to youtube in which he gives his would be reader a taste of what it is that he is attempting to in his book. He gives a metaphor that I think surmises the argument of the book- if we in the west are all goldfish and the bowl the world then the water in which we swim is Christianity. Like a moth to a flame these arguments draw me in ever closer. What follows is my attempt to transcribe a conversation between Tom Holland and an interviewer taken from the radio. It has certainly given me an appetite to read his book, what do you think?

The cross is the most potent and culturally recognized symbol human history has managed to produce. Be you the archbishop or a cardinal of atheism you see the cross but you also see Jesus. What this culturally ubiquitous symbol means, because of Jesus, is the triumph of the meek over the Imperial, finding victory at the heart of defeat. To contemplate crucifixion without that Christian revolution in meaning, I (Tom Holland) find utterly terrifying. It made me realize that I took the Christian meaning of the cross so for granted. If Christianity was a power station we have to conclude that the molten core of that generation of power is not scriptural examination or even a belief in 'religion' but the myth of the cross and the resurrection, a world without it would be too fearful.

St. Paul in the early days of the Church forsook the law and Judaic dogma and knew at the heart of what he was now preaching was the resurrection. He recognizes that this is a scandal, a shock and impossible to understand. Friedrich Nietzsche coming right at the end of the Christian period also confers with Paul, that this is a scandal. He, unlike Paul, ultimately rejects it but recognizes the seismic effect it has had upon western civilization.

Christianity of course did not emerge out of a vacuum. It goes without saying that Christianity is an entity that emerged out of one of the many Judaic traditions. Broadly speaking Judaism has to be taken as a bandwidth in which, amongst the many contests, there is a scale in which one end believes that the God of Israel is unique to them as the chosen people (Talmud tradition) and on the other end of the scale a Judaism that recognized the Supremacy of God over all nations (Hellenized Judaism). Christianity emerged out of the latter but it has within it other influences. There can be found Persian motifs refracted within it, that first civilization that sought to moralize everything. It is from here that we see the world described in dualistic terms namely the light vs the dark, good vs evil etc.

Christianity emerged at a time in which Rome was the dominant force on the world stage and indeed its infrastructure enabled the early Christian world to spread its gospel from Iraq to Cumbria. Roman culture has famously well suited for its ability to be rather plural in its culture and adoption of neighboring customs. In almost all things it sought to replicate the success of Greek civilization. From this Roman world developed the program of thought called stoicism. One of the many tenets of Stoicism is that the divine was manifest within everything; the whole world is a cosmopolis of oneness. The spark of the divine in all was talked of in the terms of the Greek word 'synadasis' which translates down to us roughly as consciousness.

So when Paul comes to dictate his great letters to the Churches we see some of this Stoic language redeployed. Paul says that the old law of Israel is no longer needed because with the death and resurrection of Christ, a new covenant has been established that binds all. The law of God written on the stone tablets of Mount Sinai have now been transcribed on to our hearts. Paul reaches out and

says that the law of God has now been written upon our 'synadasis'. This is a huge moment! In Christian civilization there is a concept of Gods law but it is not written down like it is in Judaism or in Islam but it is on the heart, this means therefore that what one considers to be correct morality, culturally offensive or appropriated can evolve over time. The more the light of our divine bearing synadasis shines the better we can become, we have the beginnings of the progressive movements.

This gets us where we are today through some incredibly potent manifestations of the same belief that God's law is now written on our consciences. We have our progressive world because we have our Christian understandings.

We take many things for granted without understanding the roots from whence they sprang. Take the understanding of the word 'religion' for example. Everyone knows religions exist in the same way cats or trees exist but this doesn't follow. The word religion again conveys the extent to which we are washed in the water of Christianity.

St. Augustine lived at the same time that Rome was sacked shortly after its conversion to Christianity. Many Romans asked the Christians why the city had fallen so soon after it had adopted the Christian God. Augustine argues that the divine cannot be fully manifested in the earthly order only the boon of Heaven is eternal and everlasting. All things on earth he argues are subject to the 'cycleum' a Latin word meaning the limits of human memory, meaning 80-100 years. Over time this comes to be the French word 'siècle' which comes to mean our word 'century'. So for Augustine the city of the 'cycleum' becomes counterpointed to the city of God. If one is trapped in the city of the 'cycleum' and wanted to enter the city of God then one had to go through a process of 'binding' oneself to God. This word 'binding' in Latin is 'religio'. This originally is used as a word reserved only for priest, monks, nuns and all who retire from civic life to bind themselves to God.

As the centuries roll on the west develops the notion that there are two realms with which we can move, the world of the 'religio' and the world of the 'cycleum'. During the 11<sup>th</sup> century Gregorian reforms of the Papacy there emerges a view that the world of the religio must be separated from that of the Cycleum. Kings who had been able to appoint cardinals and bishops were now shunned. There is a great project to drain the cycleum of all that had made it sacred (thinking back to our Stoic understanding of the manifestation of the divine in all). It follows that after the reformation of the Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century religio wasn't just for the priests or nuns but for all, everyone had their own religio, to bind themselves to God in radical new ways. Religio then comes to mean ones individual relationship with the divine but it also comes to be defined by its opposition to the cycleum. It is no surprise then that these two words come to us today as religion and secular.

By the time the Protestant British Empire came to colonize India these understandings were common place. So when the British arrived in India and asked the indigenous people what their religion was it, was met with some confusion for the dichotomy did not exist for them as it did for Christianity. It caused an Indian scholar to proclaim that Christianity advances in two way: conversion and secularization. So though India wasn't converted to Christianity in mass droves its modern political theatre is thoroughly secularized.

I end my transcription there. For more please order a copy of Dominion from Waterstones or any other local book shop as I will be doing. I think it is helpful when articulating our faith and its impact on others, we are able to articulate this great arc of history that has been so shaped and directed by our faith.