

**Review: Bamber Gascoigne, *The Christians*, Granada Publishing,  
London, UK, 1978**

Pages: 334

**Wide But Shallow History**

While this is a vast work, it is not very deep. Because the author is for all intensive purposes an Atheist, there is little Biblical understanding, discernment of the false gospel of Rome, or knowledge to expose the fraudulent Islamic religion. E.g:

1. Jesus family were peasant farmers: the Bible clearly states he was a carpenter's son (Matthew 13.55).
2. The Gospels don't mention the Trinity: the Gospel writer *John* clearly does, in I John 5.7.
3. Icons, relics, Mariolatry, the Papacy are 'Christian', and figures like Wycliffe, Hus, and Luther were heretical: Wycliffe is actually known as the morning star of the reformation for rediscovering plain fundamentals of the Bible, and denouncing idolatry of the Mass.
4. There was a wonderful *convivencia* in Sicily between 'Christianity' (East and West), and Islam: from 652-1086 Sicilians were raided, killed, and subjugated. Only with Norman arrivals were they able to kick out the Muslims.

On matters of philosophy and science, the same problem emerges, e.g, with Darwinism, or Universal Common Ascent across unobservable Deep Time. This is claimed to be science, and that it can design all living things. In reality, it is a fantastic religion which provides no testable evidence only line drawings on paper connecting living creatures to imaginary 'common ancestors'. There is only faith that random mutation and creatures dying have all the required foresight to design.

Viewing the book as a caricature of Biblical Christianity across the millennia, it is sure to impress, exactly why it received secular praises

from *The Times* et al. However, for the born-again believer it is really only useful for a wide overview of ‘Church’ history.

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## **I) A Peculiar People (pp. 1-32)**

King Agbar of Edessa, south-eastern Turkey was converted in AD 200. There are apocryphal letters from an earlier ‘Agbar’ contemporary with Jesus, in which Jesus promises to send a disciple to heal the king of an ailment.[p15]

In 1974, the Vatican officially announced the Jews were not responsible for the crucifixion.

Persia’s Mithras is said to have killed and eaten a sacred bull.

The Syrians used to worship Sol, the sun. In 274, Emperor Aurelian believed he had won victory by Sol and set up a state cult to Sol Invictus, with a feast day on December 25.

## **II) The Christian Empire (pp. 33-54)**

Byzantium had existed for centuries prior to its change to Constantinople in AD 330.

In 380, Emperor Theodosius decreed all must worship State Christianity.

Ravenna was chosen as Byzantium’s outpost in the West since it was the chief seaport between Rome and Constantinople.

Emperor Justinian self-titled as “Cosmocrator”, Ruler of the Universe.

c390, Bishop Ambrose of Milan used the threat of excommunication to sanction Emperor Theodosius after he killed 5,000 charioteer fan rioters.

The nature of the Trinity had been under discussion since Constantinople:

-“The Father could not have been so named unless he had a Son; and there could be no Son without a Father.”

-“If the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father as the Son does, why do you not say he is the brother of the Son”? If from the Son, why is he not the grandson of the Father?”.

Nestorians in Syria believed Jesus had two separate natures; Monophysites insisted he only had one.

In 843, Empress Theodora restored official icon veneration in Byzantia. This is the Feast of Orthodoxy celebrated annually on the first Sunday of Lent.

Today, only Greece and half of Cyprus are Orthodox.

In the 9<sup>th</sup>C, Boris king of Bulgaria converted to Orthodoxy. In the 10<sup>th</sup>C, grand prince Vladimir of Kiev did so.

Moscow became the “third Rome” after Constantinople’s fall.

Syrian hermits would live on top of pillars and became known as “stylites”.

Ethiopia was a self-contained Christian empire till 1974.

### **III) The Birth of Europe (pp. 55-80)**

The Goths sacked Rome in 410, and the Vandals in 455 after they had detoured through Spain and into North Africa.

Augustine responded to the 410 sacking of Rome and resulting famine, that although many Christians were killed, it taught the survivors a sparing diet and ableness to fast.

Lindisfarne, Northumbria was the perfect spot for monastery, since at low tide it could be walked to, but at high tide became an island.

St Columban crossed the Alps into Italy.

St Benedict began the Benedictine order in the valley of Subiaco.

Pope Gregory the Great sent St Augustine to the 'barbaric' English, yet the King of Kent was already Christian. It was his Romish wife Bertha that Augustine was able to enthrone himself as Archbishop of Canterbury for the Pope.

Willibrord was known as Apostle of the Frisians, and Boniface of the Germans. Both went everywhere with 'holy' relics. Boniface on how to persuade the [other] pagans:

“Why have their gods allowed the Christians to possess the countries that are rich in oil and wine ... and have left them only the frozen lands of the north? The heathens are frequently to be reminded of the supremacy of the Christian world and of the fact that those who still cling to outworn beliefs are in a very small minority.” [p69]

In 772, Charlemagne had 4,500 Saxons refusing baptism executed as it was against the law. He found favour with the pope and became his right arm, since the Byzantine emperor was far away, weak, and 'heretical'.

The Vikings burnt Bede's monastery at Jarrow in 794. They even managed to sack Rome in 1084.

Cistercian St Bernard of Clairveaux [and Mariolater] on medieval 'art': “What are these ridiculous monsters doing in the cloisters? What are these filthy apes, ferocious lions, monstrous creatures doing there? Good God, even if one is not ashamed of these stupidities, one must regret the waste of money.” [p79]

#### **IV) Faith and Fear (pp. 82-104)**

At Verges, Spain, Catholics do the “Dance of Death” by dressing up in skeleton costumes.

Travelling independent craftsmen became a privileged class of free masons as they built various cathedrals across Europe.

During the Middle Ages, a party of pilgrims is said to have set out with as much enthusiasm as a modern package tour holiday goer.

Boniface VII called indulgences a “the happy commerce”.

## **V) People of the Book (pp. 105-129)**

After conquering Christian and Muslim territories, the Mongols chose Islam as their religion. It was said they found it easier to practise and believe.

The Knights Hospitallers were originally warrior monks with a standing army of at least 2,000. After they lost Krak de Chevaliers to the Muslims in 1271, they became the Knights of Rhodes, and ultimately, the Knights of Malta.

It is said that Venetian merchants smuggled the bones of Mark out of Egypt in a barrel of pork salt so the Muslims wouldn't check it.

On 5/28/1453, the Byzantine emperor was praying to city patron Mary ('Mother of God') and icons in Santa Sophia to protect Constantinople from the Muslims.

Rome officially established her Inquisition soon after St Dominic's death.

## **VI) Princes and Prelates (pp. 130-157)**

John Wycliffe attacked the popes indulgences and called the one in Avignon at the time Antichrist. In 1409, there were *three!*

Czech scholar Jerome brought Wycliffe's books back home from Oxford University.

Sigismund, king of Hungary and Germany called a Council at Constance in 1414 to resolve the papal controversy, and examine Jan Hus, whom he gave safe passage.

One witness, Ulrich Richenthal recorded the events of 1414-5. Hus arrived in November 1414, but Sigismund reneged on his word in December.

Hus was charged with not accepting papal and priestly authority.

His friend Jerome also sought to go to Constance, but was captured and imprisoned. He was burnt at the stake ten months later after Hus.

Florence established the gold *florin* as the first stable international currency.

There was a natural friendship between the Renaissance movement and pagan antiquity.

Erasmus was in the circle of Sir Thomas More, John Fisher, and John Colet.

## **VII) Protest and Reform (pp. 158-181)**

Elector Frederick the Wise brought Luther to his strong castle of Wartburg, and gave him the alias “Junker George”.

Luther translated the NT in under three months.

Philip Melanchthon drafted the Confession of Augsburg.

In 1525, Charles V was seeking unity against the Muslim threat, yet he rejected Augsburg and threatened force, giving a nine-month ultimatum. Due to his weak position, Charles was forced to sign the Peace of Augsburg in 1555, which had the phrase *cuius regio eius religio*. Only the Lutherans were recognised by Rome.

Luther and Zwingli clashed over the Mass; the former citing Mk 14.22, the latter Jn 6.63.

In 1536, Geneva won freedom from the Kingdom of Savoy.

Calvinism was the driving force behind the Netherland’s independence from Spain.

In 1521, Pope Leo X gave Henry VIII the title of, “Defender of the Faith”.

## **VIII) The Conquest of Souls (pp. 183-209)**

In order for Spain and Portugal to gain imperial empires, they needed Papal licence.

The Mexicans believed the gods worshipped the sun, whom they called “Teotihuacan”.

In 1519, Hernan Cortez arrived with 500 soldiers and 16 horses to conquer the Americas.

Due to a ‘miracle’ on the sacred Tepeyac hill, the Aztec Virgin of Guadalupe is the most popular saint in Mexico. She is known as Tonantzin, which was the name of the terrifying Aztec goddess who wore a necklace of hands and hearts, and was addicted to blood. [p207]

### **IX) In Search of Tolerance (pp. 210-232)**

Mennonites trace their origins to Menno Simons, an Anabaptist minister in 1536.

Anabaptists held infant baptism was meaningless. Protestant Zurich reacted with violence; anyone attending an Anabaptist ceremony was to be drowned.

In 1685, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, causing over 400,000 industrious Frenchmen to leave the country.

During Elizabeth I’s reign, a licence was required to leave England, and any dissenters from the Church of England were excommunicated and harassed by the local community.

In 1579, seven Spanish provinces in the Netherlands united in the aim of achieving religious freedom.

The Pilgrims first fled to Amsterdam in 1608, then moved to Leiden before 102 of them boarded the English *Mayflower* in 1620.

In 1635, a new colony on Rhode Island practised ‘soul-liberty’. As a result it was called, “the sink into which all the rest of the colonies empty their heretics”.

The Quakers first reached New England in 1656. Founded by George Fox, who often interrupt preachers during church and engage in debates.

Their title was an epithet due to their many visions and antics, however, they called themselves the Society of Friends.

Between 1661-5, the UK Parliament passed nonconformist acts to punish dissenters. John Bunyan was imprisoned in Bedford jail for twelve years.

Roman Catholic Lord Baltimore founded Maryland in 1632 for persecuted Catholics, but in 1649 wrote the Maryland Toleration Act to accommodate Protestants.

### **X) Politeness and Enthusiasm (pp. 233-252)**

In the 1730s, John and Charles Wesley ran the Holy Club. John Wesley would eventually travel 5,000 miles a year on horseback, and preach over 40,000 sermons.

George Whitfield began Methodism in the English countryside by open-air preaching, which was against the law.

### **XI) Lighten their Darkness (pp. 253-273)**

The Muslim Zanzibar slave market of Tanzania turned over 50,000 blacks per annum. In 1873, the British forced the Sultan to close the market.

Many famous English football clubs began as local Church teams.

### **XII) The Roots of Disbelief (pp. 274-294)**

England is now one of the most secular countries in the West.

In 1871, all Oxford teaching posts were required to be held by Anglicans.

Paradoxically, after Pius IX lost the Papal States in 1848 reducing his temporal authority, his spiritual authority increased.

The Victorians were convinced Atheism would cause the end of all morality.

### **XIII) The Godless State? (pp. 295-314)**



At the Paris revolution of 1848, May de Tocqueville records: “I saw society split in two; those who possessed nothing united in common greed; those who possessed something in a common fear. No ... sympathies existed between the two classes.” [p302]

It is arguable that all Communist countries have merely replaced old gods with new, but that so far only North Korea has achieved monotheism. [p312]