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Tom Holland. *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*. New York: Basic Books, 2019.

Just when we thought the pendulum had swung irretrievably to historiographies that either bemoan or at least minimize any positive Christian influence on Western culture, this book comes out showing the extensive affirmative sway of the Christian worldview on the West. It is a powerful and largely persuasive volume. As one who teaches Christian apologetics, I find it significant, though sad, that the author is no longer a convinced believer. At the same time, he is nothing if not nostalgic about the faith he has lost. Indeed, he movingly recounts how he began as a church-going believer and then saw his faith cool off (though possibly not abandoned altogether) after realizing what an enormous world we live in. Nevertheless, his defense of the influence of the gospel on the West is robust and forceful. It is always good when even unbelievers support the right views.

The book is fresh. It is wide ranging. The author covers persons and incidents beginning back in Athens and ending in today's immigration issue in Germany. He divides Western history into three phases: Antiquity, Christendom, and "Modernitas." By his own admission, Holland's book is not a history in the strictest sense. Its great virtue is its originality. Instead of a recital of dates, battles, and treaties, the author describes often-neglected events or heroes in the unfolding of this interaction of the Christian worldview with the development of unique Western values.

His thesis, reaffirmed throughout, is that the gospel reverses the usual way in which power works by introducing love rather than conquest. This has happened over and over again throughout Western history. One might say that the basic proposal is "the meek shall inherit the earth" (cf. Matt 5:5). At the outset, he describes in gruesome detail how the method of execution consisting of tying a victim to a gibbet is among the cruelest and most humiliating, let alone painful, ever invented. Christ endured it. He argues that this suffering Lord is the key to the influence of the Christian faith on civilization: dying for the powerful rather than toppling them. Though he misses the point that Jesus's suffering is far greater than physical, he has caught the fundamental biblical message: "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly," and through this he "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him" (Rom 5:6; Col 2:15).

The text is over five hundred pages long. Though he covers many centuries, we never feel rushed. This is because Holland is a master storyteller. A

couple of examples among many can be cited. In a chapter on charity he recounts the rivalry of citizens from Poitiers and Tours over the rights to the body of Saint Martin. Why? Because he was a new kind of hero. If the Greeks and Romans adulated great warriors, by the fourth century it was those who gave away the most of their possessions who were celebrated. Of Martin, well-attested legend said that he resigned from the army. In the coldest of winters, he spotted a poor freezing beggar and gave him half of his warm military coat. As did Jesus in the parable of the good Samaritan, Martin shocked those around him by renouncing the power available to him as a soldier and becoming like the hated outsider who was the only one to have compassion on a helpless victim. When the denizens of Tours won the rights to his remains, they did so because everyone was convinced he “was touched by Christ himself” (147). Though born in Hungary, he became a French bishop and will always be known as Saint Martin de Tours. The area he served became known for its charitable way of life.

Because of his interest in featuring people who are not the usual suspects, some of his choices will seem curious. In his discussion of abolition, there is no mention of William Wilberforce. The diplomatic Castlereagh steps in, instead. And there are no black abolitionists (Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Equiano, etc.). But Benjamin Lay (1682–1759), the Quaker, has a major part. After being expelled from Barbados because of his radical opposition to the treatment of slaves, he moved to the Philadelphia area and with his wife campaigned vigorously against the evils of slavery. He spoke about the horrors of the whip and the general conditions of slave labor. Though William Penn, himself a Quaker, was the founder of the Pennsylvania colony, with its motto from the book of Leviticus, “To proclaim liberty throughout the land” (Lev 25:10), Lay considered it sheer hypocrisy, since whips and chains were sold in the markets of the City of Brotherly Love (385). The ultimate effectiveness of such abolitionists is not scrutinized.

Indeed, the entire discussion of modern slavery, somewhat brief, occurs buried within the two chapters on the Enlightenment in which he discusses the defense of the vulnerable. Along the way, he covers Voltaire’s vindication of the Huguenot Jean Calas and the bizarre Marquis de Sade. His point in both cases is that even these radical skeptics built on a platform of freedom of expression made possible only in the Christian message. In his brief treatment of the United States during the Enlightenment, he makes a considerable point from the statement in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal,” which endows them with “unalienable rights.” The instinct for reformation, the renewal of society so active in the American experiment, while claimed by the *philosophes*, originated much farther back

with Gregory VII. Much later in the book Holland returns to America. He praises Martin Luther King Jr. for his prophetic work, defending oppressed blacks, based on good “theological presumptions.” He even sees in feminist movements represented by *The Handmaid’s Tale* and the #Me Too initiative a Christian, even Pauline (Gal 3:28) background, one that pleads for equality between the sexes.

Again, in the defense of women’s equality, from the Middle Ages, some choices are strange. For example, in chapter 11, titled “Flesh: Milan,” the character he writes about is Guglielma (1210–1281). Though likely of noble birth, she chose to live in dire poverty. As a cult leader, she attracted quite a following. She taught that the end was soon and that she herself would return raised from the dead as the Holy Spirit! Everything about Guglielma was heretical: a female priest, her claim to be God, celibacy (and therefore a possible seductress)—these were intolerable departures from the church. So, her books were burned, only to reemerge, thanks to a certain Antonio Bonfadini, who wrote a hagiographic biography of this woman in 1425. This was followed by the humanist playwright Antonia Pulci, who set Guglielma’s story to a drama in the late fifteenth century. From his account of this strange woman, Holland abruptly transitions to a discussion of Mary in the Middle Ages, who, he says, embodies the paradoxes at the heart of the Christian faith, such as the thick theological tomes produced in the Middle Ages alongside the simple biblical images of a mother suffering for her son’s sake (276). Would it not have been wiser to highlight less controversial women, such as Hilda of Whitby or Catherine de Pisan?

Owing no doubt to Holland’s career as a journalist, as well as his general interests, we are treated to a good look at the Beatles, the Iraq war, and evangelicals for Donald Trump. All of these are somehow related to either a statement of, or a distortion of, the Christian message as an agency of deep reform. In the end, Holland tells us, “Love, and do as you will. It was—as the entire course of Christian history so vividly demonstrated—a formula for revolution” (495). His allusion to John Ronald Reuel Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* is a poignant and convincing way to retell the story of World War II and the threat to Western civilization (477–81).

This book will have been widely reviewed, as it deserves. Some reviewers find it naïve, or at least one sided. In my own view I think certain analyses could be a bit more nuanced. Yet he is surprisingly favorable on John Calvin, on the Puritans, and on missionaries. On the Crusades he does not fall into caricatures. He is very much aware of the role of the Christian faith in developing modern science. There would be none if it were not for the Christian commitments of its founders. Even Charles Darwin is said to

have desired to defend a designer God. He eventually was not able to do that, at least in any sort of orthodox manner. In a touching aside, Holland reminds us that Darwin's struggles with the Christian God were based on his incredulity at the creation being based on so much suffering. One rather weeps at this finding.

I do object to the cover! It is the famous *Christ of Saint John of the Cross* by Salvador Dali. In my view it is a deeply blasphemous painting, showing a Christ hanging, not on the cross, but on a Gnostic scaffold with perfect wooden beams, without nails, without blood, without agony (contrary to what Holland had said in the first part of the book about crucifixion). The painting was motivated by an inspiration Dali apparently had, in part based on a drawing kept in the Convent of the Incarnation in Avila, perhaps done by Saint John himself after a vision he had. The perfectly muscular Christ is looking down toward the earth, with no semblance of the compassionate suffering on behalf of sinners. This is odd, considering the title of the book is *Dominion*, presumably meaning the dominion of tough love over against the raw power of the present world structures. I believe this is an unfortunate choice, one possibly imposed by the editors.

This excellent book reminds us of two things. First, powerfully and disturbingly Holland describes the presence of evil in the world and the need for redemptive love to overcome it. From the unspeakable cruelties of the Third Reich to the abuses of Harvey Weinstein, Holland makes no attempt to whitewash the horrors of human history. That diagnosis in itself is of course a profoundly Christian insight. But second, his ultimate message is hopeful. The power of Christ to overcome evil produces the kind of dominion he ultimately believes in. Holland believes it is still at work, and we should be grateful for it and cultivate it for the future.

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Herman Bavinck. *Christian Worldview*. Translated and edited by Nathaniel Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory C. Brock. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019.

Talk of a Christian worldview has fallen on hard times of late within some of the diverse circles of Reformed thought. Some see it as the driver of a lopsided approach to Christian faith and religious life, which places an undue emphasis on the cognitive. Others indict it with the charge of