

## Protestant Wave

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*Author's note: This is an excerpt from a much larger essay devoted to both critical analysis of the intellectual history created during Neptune's last three passages through tropical Pisces and forecast of developments for the current cycle, entitled "Spirit of the Times." Due to unavoidable time constraints, completion of this larger essay has been delayed. But I nonetheless wanted to make this first installment available as Neptune begins its sustained 14 year passage through the sign.*

### Setting our frame

Neptune is associated in the astrological literature with the holons of idealism, myth, illusion, changing fashions in thought and spiritual practice, and urges to transcendence and / or escapism. It is strongly emphasized in the charts of mystics and addicts, idealistic reformers and con men, authentic visionaries and space cadets. Neptune's cycle through the tropical zodiac requires roughly 164 years from start to finish. It resides in a specific sign (or phase) for approximately 14 years. Hence, of the well-correlated bodies, it is typically judged the second most influential.

Pisces, the concluding phase of twelve in the zodiacal cycle, is visually associated with the image of two fishes swimming in divergent directions. As Robert Hand relates in his essay *The Age and Constellation of Pisces (Essays on Astrology, Para Research)*, the original Greek morphomaton (or star picture) for Pisces consisted of one fish swimming towards the heavens, away from the ecliptic, while the other swims parallel to it, as if towards the future. This alternation between urges to spiritual transcendence or escapism and a desire to create a better life and world in the here and now can be most viscerally experienced via interactions with representative individuals (that is, human beings born with the Sun, Moon, or Ascendant – *and ideally two or more of these bodies, plus additional planets* – in the zodiacal phase of Pisces). As with representatives of the other highly dualistic phase of the zodiac, Gemini, Pisceans can appear to others as expressing an astonishing inconsistency of thought and intention, even when they themselves feel their approach is consistent. For better or for worse, this external inconsistency is endemic to both Gemini and Pisces (making twins born during either phase spectacularly unsuitable subjects in any study hoping to demonstrate either internal or external coherence) – and this inconsistency must be assumed operative in any mundane analysis of the potentials for a period.

Neptune returned to Pisces on April 4, 2011. It last exited Pisces in February 1862. Its stay was initially brief – a period of a mere 4 months before the retrograde segment of its annual cycle compelled its return one final time to Aquarius. It commenced its sustained 14 year passage through the sign on February 4, 2012.

### Past as prologue

My goals for this essay are two: one, to identify the key intellectual and cultural themes associated with Neptune's last three passages through Pisces; and two, to later recycle these themes as templates for likely developments in our current cycle. The research presented in this section is best thought of my personal synthesis of scholarship originally offered by others – to whom I am extraordinarily indebted. To bring that point home, I have deliberately adopted an informal, non-academic style for presenting this synthesis – in the hope communicating how utterly dependant my knowledge of these eras is on the work of others. A complete bibliography of the source materials that contributed to this synthesis appears at the conclusion of the essay.

### Cycle I: 1520-1534 "Protestant Wave"

The first of these three cycles commenced in 1520 and has the most immediate resonance with our times, inasmuch as Pluto had also begun its passage through Capricorn in 1515, mirroring its position in the tropical zodiac today. The signature development of this period is without doubt the initial phase of the Protestant Reformation – and for quite a number of reasons that I trust will become self-evident in due course, it will be my sole focus in this section. As I have emphasized in my Pluto cycle essays, Pluto's passage through the tenth phase of the zodiacal cycle tends to incite among humanity an urge

for deconstruction of unhealthy institutional authority. To illustrate this point, I note that Martin Luther first posted his *Ninety-Five Theses* on October 31, 1517. For more on the archetypal impact of Pluto, see my essays: “A Brief Look Forward”, “Size Matters”, and “A Bubble in Time”.

By the time Neptune reached Pisces on March 11, 1520, Luther’s stubborn disputation of Catholic orthodoxy had landed him in hot water with both the Vatican and the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Within the next year he would be ex-communicated by Rome and, inasmuch as heretics were routinely burned at the stake, literally forced to defend both his life and faith at the Diet of Worms. Luther’s celebrated defense on April 19, 1521 is perhaps the single most influential expression of individual conscience in western history. It would set the tone for both his era and those that followed, inciting ripples in a sea of faith, not to mention a tidal wave of unintended consequences.

*“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen.*

Inasmuch as Neptune is thought to govern the holon of myth, and the period marking its last passage through Pisces can be precisely linked to the zenith of the romantic movement in music, literature, and politics (more on that later in this essay), it is perhaps fitting that Luther’s most fondly remembered words from Worms, “Here I stand. I can do no other” are today considered legendary.

Luther did not wait for the Diet’s verdict. He had been guaranteed a safe passage home and wisely took his leave. He would be condemned a few days later and become a wanted man. Fortunately for Luther, on that trip home he would be placed into protective custody by Frederick III, Elector of Saxony (who had been responsible for the original promise of safe passage) in Wartburg Castle. With little else to do during his ‘captivity’, the now ex-Augustinian cleric used this period to translate the entire New Testament into German. It had previously only been available in Latin. In doing so, Luther made these scriptures that much more accessible to every native speaker in the land. Of course, once German speaking peoples could read scripture for themselves, or hear it read to them by others, they were also that much freer to creatively interpret its meaning – oft times in ways that would stand Luther’s hair on end.

Luther had originally intended a relatively modest critique of Catholic orthodoxy. As Philip Cary argues (in *Luther: Gospel, Law, and Reformation*), Luther’s goal was essentially to distinguish between the specific demands made on Christians by scripture and that multitude of practices, however spiritually beneficial in an appropriate context, that had become obligatory or made overly prominent over the centuries (such as the purchasing of indulgences, pilgrimages, etc.) by church authorities. In order to steel his case, perhaps both in his own mind and the courts of ecclesiastic and public opinion, Luther fashions his resistance to Vatican hegemony around the primacy of scripture – capsulized in the Latin phrase, *sola scriptura*. Brad Gregory (in his *History of Christianity in the Reformation Era*) further argues that Luther never intended to establish a right for everyone to interpret scripture as he or she saw fit, but was instead asserting what he believed the authoritative view of how scripture should be interpreted. This crucial distinction would be lost on any number of Luther’s contemporaries.

We each inescapably interpret the world through the lens afforded by our personal understanding. As Gregory argues, as a leading figure in the Augustinian order, responsible for overseeing numerous monasteries, and for hearing the confessions of hundreds of monks and laymen, Luther viewed human beings as inherently sinful – and the demands of scripture as impossible for human beings to consistently accommodate. Hence, Luther’s second key assertion, *sola fide*, or the justification by faith alone. Man could do nothing to improve his chances for eternal salvation; grace was a gift from God alone, not something that could be earned, much less purchased. Five hundred years later, some of these distinctions can seem arcane, if not the hothouse fantasies of what appears to secular researchers as a sin-obsessed cleric living in an emotion-fueled era.

For instance, as viewed through a contemporary Deistic lens, the great flaw in Luther’s theological formulation is best illustrated through reference to his later anti-Semitism. Luther does not start out his spiritual journey hostile to Jews. But given the extraordinary emphasis he comes to place on the

“promises” made by Jesus in scripture, with regard to both a hope for eternal salvation and as an analgesic for the sometimes intense emotional pain engendered by often irrational Christian guilt, any group that dared challenge the idea that Jesus is the authentic fulfillment of Hebrew prophecy, and hence the undoubted truth and way, would inevitably earn a place on his hit list.

Consider Luther’s own words, from his later work, “*On the Jews and Their Lies*”:

*“First to set fire to their synagogues or schools and bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of his Son and of his Christians. For whatever we tolerated in the past unknowingly - and I myself was unaware of it - will be pardoned by God. But if we, now that we are informed, were to protect and shield such a house for the Jews, existing right before our very nose, in which they lie about, blaspheme, curse, vilify, and defame Christ and us (as was heard above), it would be the same as if we were doing all this and even worse ourselves, as we very well know.”*

Yet, as Bart Ehrman suggests in any number of his books and lectures, amplifying a thesis originally postulated by Albert Schweitzer, the uncomfortable fact is that the historical Jesus may simply not fulfill Biblically-literate Jews’ expectations for the Son of Man. Jewish prophecy points to a new David or Solomon, a King and deliverer of his people in the here and now, not a visionary Rabbi talking about a Kingdom not of this earth, who the Romans will crucify for being a troublemaker – but over the course of the next three centuries become the centerpiece of a world religion that will command the loyalty of 5%-8% of the Roman Empire by 312 AD, the year of Constantine’s conversion. Ehrman goes so far as to argue that first century Gentile Christians literally expropriated the books of the Hebrew Bible in order to impress the Romans, who had little tolerance for innovation – and hence were not likely to look favorably on an upstart religion. Thus, at least as seen through contemporary eyes, one of the core precepts in Luther’s religious revolution leads not only to the overthrow of unhealthy Vatican hegemony, and eventual religious liberty for all Christians, but also to Kristallnacht and the Holocaust – although, as per Arthur Williamson (in *Apocalypse Now, Apocalypse Then*), Luther’s evangelical-fueled anti-Semitism need be carefully distinguished from the race-based anti-Semitism that will emerge in Catholic Spain as a result of the Reconquista and subsequent Inquisition.

Luther’s third foundational precept, the priesthood of all believers, was squarely aimed at deconstructing the medieval notion that Popes, monks, and priests were living inherently holier lives than the rest of humanity – a idea, in an age of primogeniture, that clearly wasn’t tenable. Primogeniture involved the practice where an entire family estate was left to the eldest son – thus guaranteeing that estates were not dispersed through inheritance and that family power and influence remained more or less constant. One of the societal implications of primogeniture was that second or third sons often entered the clergy, due less to some sense of religious vocation than one of sheer career necessity. And as anyone watching *Showtime’s* new series, *The Borgias*, is discovering (or discovered while watching Season 1 of *The Tudors*, and the antics of Cardinal Woolsey), the elite clergy of Luther’s era could live extremely well.

One of the first reforms that Luther would advocate after his ex-communication is the elimination of priestly celibacy. Scripture does not require it, with the *New Testament* only requiring only that a bishop “be without reproach, the husband of one wife” (I Timothy 3:2). While priests were free not to marry during the first millennium of Christianity, the Vatican would ultimately make celibacy mandatory. In practice, however, both the elite and local clergy of Luther’s time often lived with concubines – thus furthering the perception of clerical hypocrisy.

Could there be cosmic factors that account for Luther’s more liberal attitude in this area? I argue yes. Scorpio, the eighth phase in the zodiacal cycle, is perhaps most vividly associated in the public imagination with an interest in sex. While this association represents a gross simplification of the elemental energies engaged during this phase of the cycle, the desire for intense sexual expression is nonetheless typical of even the ordinary Scorpio type. Born November 10, 1483 (in Eisleben, Germany, no reliable birth time available), Luther was no ordinary Scorpio. Luther’s birth chart features four planets in Scorpio, including the Sun, Venus, and Mars. It also features a tight conjunction of Venus and Saturn – a signature typically associated with persistent feelings of personal inferiority, an urge to submission or service through committed partnership, and even an inclination to either erotic or

devotional sadomasochism. The facts are that, after the break with Rome, Luther not only rejects priestly celibacy as a model but also takes a wife (an ex-nun who he had helped escape her convent). I would speculate that Luther's early awareness of intense, difficult to repress (and likely unconventional) sexual impulses, juxtaposed against the Gospel's uncompromising attitude towards sexual licentiousness, account for more than a little of the extraordinary sense of guilt and shame that historians note when describing his essential temperament. Luther's chart additionally features an Aries Moon – strongly suggestive of an emotionally assertive, authoritative style, a suggestion entirely consistent with scholarly evaluation of his personality.

While Luther's early attempts at Church reform would enjoy warm support in elite Christian Humanist circles, it hardly represented a mass movement. By the early 1520s (and Neptune's arrival in Pisces), however, the Reformation would go viral, becoming initially a noisy and rebellious popular movement, particularly in Southern Germany and Austria. Catholic religious icons, like statues or stained glass windows, would be smashed, Masses disrupted, baptismal fonts defecated in, and clergy savagely mocked in pamphlets, broadsheets, and woodcuts. As Gregory emphasizes, this extraordinary response is best understood as the outrage of believers who were becoming convinced that they had now uncovered the truth, after having previously been deliberately misled.

Gregory differentiates between two divergent waves of reform during the early 1520s, one tending towards what he calls magisterial Protestantism and the other towards a radical / communal Protestantism. Luther is one two primary agents for the initial magisterial wave of reform during this period, the other being Huldrych Zwingli.

Zwingli was born in the Swiss Confederacy in 1484. The Swiss Confederacy of the sixteenth century was not the unified nation state of modern times, but rather a loosely linked collection of highly autonomous cantons, connected solely by a joint defense treaty. This tradition of autonomy would prove crucial in the religious strife that would ultimately ensue, and become a template for the rest of Europe over the next two centuries.

As Gregory relates, Zwingli trained as a humanist scholar before receiving ordination as a priest, ultimately developing a warm friendship with the great Catholic humanist reformer (and translator of the Bible into Latin), Desiderius Erasmus. This friendship would endure until the controversies of the early 1520s. As a humanist scholar, Zwingli brought a passion for literary analysis to the ministry he assumed in the canton of Zurich in 1519. He incited controversy at the outset of this ministry through his decision to ignore texts traditionally associated with the church liturgical calendar, and instead proceed with a book-by-book analysis of the Gospel of Matthew, followed next by *Acts of the Apostles*, and so forth. This kind of literary approach had not been previously attempted as part of a Catholic Mass – and was not uniformly embraced by parishioners. Moreover, by adopting this approach, Zwingli was openly rejecting Church tradition.

By the early 1520s (and, again, Neptune's passage into Pisces), Zwingli had become a consistent critic of Catholic orthodoxy – for instance, according to Wikipedia, rejecting veneration of the Saints, the notion that unbaptized children were inevitably damned, the spiritual impact of Vatican excommunication, etc. By 1522, he would further challenge Catholic authorities by siding with Zurich citizens who had eaten meat during Lent (and thus violated long-standing ecclesiastical regulations), arguing that scripture contained no specific requirement forbidding it. Later that year he would petition the bishop of Constance for the elimination of priestly celibacy (after secretly marrying a widow). In each of these areas, Zwingli's approach is roughly equivalent to that of Luther. These resulting controversies were deemed so serious that the Zurich city council, the governing body that Zwingli had become a member of in 1521, felt a need to intervene, via the January 1523 First Zurich Disputation. After hearing all sides, the city council elected to support Zwingli's approach and mandate that all preaching in the city hereafter be based solely on scripture. As Gregory emphasizes, this marks a turning point for the Reformation – and a point of demarcation between the Lutheran and Swiss Reform traditions. While Luther, citing Paul's letter to the Romans, saw church and state as two distinct kingdoms, kingdoms that could only corrupt each other were they allowed to intermingle, Zwingli sought to literally establish a Christian city-state, whose laws were all to be derived from God's laws (assuming that one could actually agree on what God's laws were – especially, as we will discover, by the arrival

of Neptune's nineteenth century passage through Pisces, and the publication of Charles Darwin's "*The Origin of Species*").

Reformation passions in Zurich only accelerate in the wake of the First Zurich Disputation, leading to even greater controversies, like a call for the abolishment of the Catholic Mass and the removal of all religious images from houses of worship. These passions necessitated the convening of a Second Zurich Disputation, which took place a mere nine months later, in September 1523. At this disputation the city council concurred with Zwingli that the mass should be abolished and that religious images should be removed from churches – but only over time, not immediately. This angers the fire-breathing element among the reformers, the future Anabaptists, who see Zwingli as being compromised by his willingness to accommodate civil authorities. By 1525, they become further enraged when Zwingli sides with these same authorities over the issue of mandatory infant baptism – a practice clearly not mandated by scripture, but more an accommodation of long-established (and cherished) tradition. By 1526, the city council decides that it's heard enough debate on this issue, and outright bans the practice of adult re-baptism – literally employing drowning as a means of execution for several of the dissenting Anabaptist leaders who refuse to either desist in the practice or leave the city. Given that the planet Neptune is named after the often vengeful god of the sea, and that the glyph for Pisces features two fishes, there are quite a number of witticisms I could offer here – but given the reality of what actually occurred, and why, they would assuredly not be in good taste.

Given the Swiss tradition of autonomy, and the dramatically different social conditions in cities and villages, it should not be surprising that the rural and urban cantons failed to agree on the universal validity of Zwingli's reforms. By 1528, the cantons of Berne and Basle join Zurich to form a Swiss Protestant alliance – while five rural cantons reject Zwingli's reforms, form a Catholic alliance, and seek to oust Zurich from the Confederation itself. Tensions come to head, first in 1529, and again in 1531, when an economic blockade by the Protestant block against the Catholic cantons leads to retaliation – and the Second Kappel War, in which Zwingli is killed while exhorting the forces of Zurich in battle.

In hindsight, had either the Vatican or Luther known of Neptune and Pluto (neither of which had been discovered by that point), and the mix of evangelical and apocalyptic energies these two planets' simultaneous placement in Pisces and Capricorn were likely to generate, perhaps the worst excesses of the period could have been avoided. There was an extremely relevant astrological precedent for this period – the years 47-61 AD. These years marked both the middle period of Paul's ministry to the Gentiles and the specific period when the very first books of the New Testament, Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Thessalonians, Galatians, and Romans, were written. The hypothetical Q (or "Quelle") document that contemporary scholars consider a primary source for the three synoptic gospels (Mark, Matthew and Luke) may also originate from this period. The earliest estimate of scholars for the *Gospel of Mark* would also place its publication at the very end of this period.

The apocalyptic expectations of early Christians had long been downplayed by Catholic authorities – largely, I suspect, because these expectations proved as erroneous as those of Harold Camping and his Family Radio flock for May 21, 2011. Still, they are the rationale that Paul, for instance, gives his audience in Corinthians for considering marital relations of secondary concern: "

*"Now, let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: The time that remains is very short, so husbands should not let marriage be their major concern. Happiness or sadness or wealth should not keep anyone from doing God's work. **Those in frequent contact with the things of this world should make good use of them without becoming attached to them, for this world and all it contains will pass away.**" (7 Corinthians 29-31)*

And consider Jesus' alleged words in the Gospel of Mark:

*"Then everyone will see the Son of Man arrive on the clouds with great power and glory. And he will send forth his angels to gather together his chosen ones from all over the world – from the farthest ends of the earth and heaven. Now, learn a lesson from the fig tree. When its buds become tender and its leaves begin to sprout, you know without being told that summer is near. Just so, when you see the events I've described beginning to happen, you can be sure that his return is very, very near, right at the door. **I assure you, this generation will not pass from the scene until all these events have taken place.**" (13 Mark 26-30)*

But 'pass away' the world did not – which raises the possibility, at least in this astrologer's mind, that these expectations were less a part of the historical Jesus' actual ministry and more a byproduct of these later times, a spirit roughly similar to those of the 1520s. In any event, by the early 1520s both Luther and Thomas Müntzer, a leader of the radical wing of the Reformation, had come to believe that the end times had indeed arrived, with the thousand year rule of Christ just over horizon.

Given the specific religious programming that framed Luther's understanding, I argue that his apocalypticism is relatively understandable. For instance, by the year 1518 (and Pluto's third year in Capricorn) Luther had become engaged in debate with a number of Vatican representatives, including Cardinal Caietan and Sylvester Prierias, the official Papal theologian. Although Luther had not challenged the authority of the Pope in his *Ninety-Five Theses*, he was now being told that his mere objection to the selling of indulgences was tantamount to an attack on Papal authority, and hence an act of heresy. Consider, for instance, the critique published by Prierias in 1518:

*"The Roman Church and the Pope cannot err when the Pope is acting in his capacity as Pope to make a decision, when he comes to a decision as a consequence of his office. Therefore, whoever does not hold to the teachings of the Roman Church and the Pope, as an infallible rule of truth, from which even Holy Scripture draws its power and authority, is a heretic."*

*"Whoever says in regard to indulgences that the Roman Church cannot do, as she actually has done, is a heretic."*

In 1519, citing Canon Law, Prierias states in another response to Luther:

*"If the Pope were so scandalously bad that he led multitudes of souls to the devil, still he could not be removed from office."*

Now place yourself in Luther's shoes for a moment. Imagine being steeped in the apocalyptic books of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Imagine being told by the chief Papal theologian that scripture only draws its authority from the human, often all-too-human head of the Catholic Church (especially in Luther's time, when the Pope could be a Borgia or a Medici). Imagine knowing that your life was literally on the line, and yet being told in no uncertain terms by the chief Papal theologian that even if a Pope's decisions so were so scandalously bad that they were responsible for millions of the faithful being condemned to an eternity in hell, his authority still had to be respected. What kind of malevolent authority would you suspect that you were dealing with? Luther's not-so-shocking conclusion, given his programming: *The Papacy must be Anti-Christ*. And if Rome was indeed Anti-Christ, the force prophesized in John of Patmos' *Revelation*, then God must surely be ready to bring down the curtain on this phase of humanity's story. But it was God, not Luther, who would bring down that curtain. Thomas Müntzer had different ideas – but before turning to Müntzer, let me sketch a bit more historical context.

While Luther may have originally intended only a modest critique of Catholic orthodoxy, his upsetting of the "Great Chain of Being", the intellectual system of settled hierarchies that established everyone's place within the medieval social order, with the King and Pope at its head and the lowly peasant, animals, and inanimate nature at or near its feet, nonetheless sent a message to other Christians that perhaps the time arrived when long-standing grievances could be addressed, and, potentially, even a new social order established. Furthermore, Luther's specific emphasis on the authority of scripture naturally led to questions as to why Jesus' actual social teachings had had so little impact on feudal society. For instance, despite having enjoyed a greater degree of privilege and prosperity in the century after the Black Death swept Europe (due to the scarcity of labor and plentitude of available farmland that the Bubonic plague left in its wake), the period from 1450 onwards was one where peasants found themselves increasingly squeezed by the feudal elites of the time. This mounting sense of economic and social inequality, in an allegedly Christian society to boot, led to calls for a great leveling - a leveling much in the spirit of a biblical text that a child born with the Sun conjunct Neptune in Pisces, a few months into Neptune's next passage into Pisces, would famously set to music, and make an indelible part of our species' shared cultural heritage.

*"Ev'ry valley shall be exalted,  
and ev'ry mountain and hill made low;  
the crooked straight and the rough places plain." (Isaiah 40:4)*



As I referenced in my introductory comments, the original Greek star picture for Pisces features one fish swimming away from the ecliptic, as if towards the heavens, while the other swims parallel to the ecliptic, as if towards the future. This tendency typically expresses itself as a dichotomy between pursuits thought to be “of the spirit” of those thought to be “of the world”. But sometimes an attempt is made to reconcile these two seemingly divergent tendencies. The peasants’ uprising of the mid-1520s represents an imperfect attempt at synthesis, and an early expression of what the twentieth century would call Liberation Theology.

Gregory describes this peasant’s uprising as the most extensive mass movement in Europe prior to the French Revolution. Thomas Müntzer was a former Catholic priest and leader of the Thüringen peasant uprising. The Thüringen uprising was one of five uprisings that more-or-less simultaneously erupted in France, Germany, and Austria between the years 1524-1526. While initially supportive of Luther, by the early 1520s Müntzer had become a harsh critic of scripturally-bound magisterial Protestant reformers like Luther and Zwingli. Müntzer further claimed that personal revelation, or an “inner word”, was as valid a guide for human action as scripture – despite the fact that this “inner word” might be different from person to person. Müntzer additionally divided the world into camps of good and evil, arguing that the time had come for the former to eradicate the latter, thus bringing the long promised millennium into being.

Again, as viewed through a twenty-first century Deistic lens, the most obvious flaw in Müntzer’s approach is that his “inner word” appears an utter repudiation of Jesus’ actual philosophy of non-violence – thus making the peasants’ authentic grievances appear much less sympathetic to Christian contemporaries. For instance, despite his own relatively humble origins and general sympathy with peasants’ plight, Luther would vehemently reject this movement (in no small part, I suspect, out of fear of seeing his more centrist reforms tainted by the carnage that these radicals were advocating).

To offer a bit of cosmological perspective as a contrast to Müntzer’s militarism, within a year of Neptune’s nineteenth century ingress into Pisces, Henry David Thoreau, the American transcendentalist, would propose a very different, eminently Christian, and infinitely more sympathetic means for challenging long-established societal injustice (not to mention a far better armed and trained opponent) within a Christian society. Thoreau’s philosophy of “Civil Disobedience” would later strongly influence both Mohandas Gandhi’s and Martin Luther King’s successful campaigns to remove the yoke of British imperialism and Jim Crow-era segregation – exploiting the principle of Satyagraha (or “soul force”) to publicly expose the forces of the established order as those of darkness and oppression. We cannot know if a non-violent, pietistic movement for economic reform would have been wildly effective, given the entrenched attitudes of the nobility of the period – but we can say with great confidence that such a movement would have been entirely consistent with the authentic life and example set by the Nazarene. Müntzer’s wasn’t.

Perhaps Müntzer’s greatest mistake was that of buying into the always perilous idea that God was prepared to intervene in human affairs – and, of course, both on your side and on your schedule. Although leading a rag-tag collection of 9,000 peasants, armed with little more than farm tools, against the combined forces of two Princes’ trained militia, including cavalry and artillery, Müntzer convinced his followers that God would somehow render them invincible. They weren’t – with 5,000 peasants dying in the climactic battle, and their leader losing his head shortly thereafter. An estimated 70,000 to 100,000 peasants died in the multiple battles that constituted the Peasant’s War – and this death toll does not include those exterminated later who were not advocating violence, but simply tainted by their association, however remote, with the rebels. In that specific sense, Müntzer and his ilk had indeed brought on an Apocalypse (and with it, the inadvertent end of his followers’ suffering) – but the thousand years reign of Christ was not to follow.

Apart from my correlation of cultural developments extracted from the historical record, what other astrological rationale can I offer for this tendency for apocalyptic thinking when transiting Neptune and Pluto are simultaneously situated in Pisces and Capricorn? Consider this: as the last phase of the zodiacal cycle, Pisces is inherently associated with the process of conclusion and dissolution. I submit that there is a definite sense when slow moving bodies travel through Pisces that something is ending – never to return in quite the same way again. When Neptune is that slow moving body, this sense is

likely to involve a mythic, artistic, or philosophical worldview. And yet because Pisces is also about fulfillment (given its traditional rulership by Jupiter), there is also a sense of urgency that everything promised earlier in the cycle now be fulfilled. Furthermore, given this traditional association of Pisces with Jupiter, which itself has much to do with the pomp, ceremony, and creeds that serve as the foundation of organized religions, this is also a period when interest in powers greater than oneself becomes emphasized.

When Pluto is passing through Capricorn, as it has been since early 2008, I submit that there is a palatable sense that an existing temporal order, the world as we have literally always known it, is being deconstructed. For some, especially those heavily invested in the existing economic or social order, this process may well feel like the end of the world – even if, when viewed objectively, it represents nothing of the sort, but simply the transition from one developmental phase of a civilization to another.

The last development that I need cover in this section, inasmuch as it represents the perfect bridge to my analysis of the next passage of Neptune through Pisces is the Henrician Reformation of Henry VIII of England. Henry does not start out the 1520s sympathetic to any Protestant thinker. In fact, he authors a tract supporting the Church's position vis-à-vis Luther in 1521, "The Defence (sic) of the Seven Sacraments", for which he is cited by Leo X as a "Defender of the Faith" (the same title Pius XII would later famously confer on Generalissimo Franco of Fascist Spain). And while there had always been religious dissenters in England, there isn't much evidence of a popular groundswell against Catholicism during this period – or against its clergy, despite elite grumblings about clerical abuses such as pluralism (which in the language of this period referred to the practice of Bishops and Cardinals simultaneously controlling a number of different bishoprics, from each of which they received substantial income) and exemption of clergy from prosecution under the Common Law. In fact, according to scholars, it appears that the typical Englishman was quite happy being Catholic – and as events would later demonstrate, would only be brought over to the Protestant cause kicking and screaming. But once enlisted in that cause, they would prove among the most stubborn Protestants in Western Europe.

As Gregory, Dale Hoak, and Robert Bucholz all relate (and Showtime's "*The Tudors*" faithfully represents), the Henrician Reformation is very much a top-down affair. Henry's disenchantment with Rome comes only after his infatuation with Anne Boleyn brings home the reality that Catherine of Aragon, his current wife, is unlikely to bear a male heir (especially if Henry can no longer bring himself to sleep with her). And with memory of both the War of the Roses, and the struggles of his father, Henry VII, to establish his supremacy foremost in mind, Henry resolves to have the Vatican annul his marriage to Catherine. This annulment proves problematic – inasmuch as the previous Pope, Julius II, had previously granted Henry a special dispensation so that he could marry his late brother's wife, while the current Pope is reluctant to antagonize Catherine's extremely powerful nephew, Charles V of Spain. In that specific sense, I argue that the dynamics compelling the English Reformation are much more a product of Pluto's passage through Capricorn than Neptune's passage through Pisces – at least when considered from the King's perspective, and his need to assert supremacy over what will ultimately become known as the Church of England. That said, let there be no doubt that Anne Boleyn's, Thomas Cromwell's, Bishop John Fisher's, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's, and Thomas Moore's celebrated roles in this drama are least partially, if not wholly, impelled by a sense of spiritual mission – which I argue is one of the signatures of any Neptune in Pisces period. We will see this specific manifestation in each of our next two cycles – even if secular modes of expression emerge as manifestations as well.

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## Coming later in 2012-2013:

### *Introduction*

*1684-1697 (Cycle II) – Glorious Revolutions*

*1847-1862 (Cycle III) – Romantic Zenith*

*2011-2025 (Cycle IV) – Testing “the proposition”*