

The Fall and Rise of Human Violence

Why crime plunged in the 17th century but is rising again in the 21st

by Berit Kjos - Updated December 17, 2012

"If we will not be governed by God, then we will be ruled by tyrants." William Penn, 1-3-1701



[A Devious Plot](#)
[Human Nature](#)
[Home](#)

As history repeats itself, the civilized world is regressing. Paganism, promiscuity, deception and violent crime are on the rise, while the growing hatred for Biblical Christianity is fanned by a global media and entertainment industry that wants nothing more than the death of Biblical Truth and morality.

In an article titled, "[How the liberals ruined Britain.](#)" Melanie Phillips sheds light on this amoral morass:

"The violent anarchy that has taken hold of British cities is the all-too-predictable outcome of a three-decade liberal experiment which **tore up virtually every basic social value**. The married two-parent family, educational meritocracy, punishment of criminals... and many more fundamental conventions were all smashed by a liberal intelligentsia hell-bent on a revolutionary transformation of society.

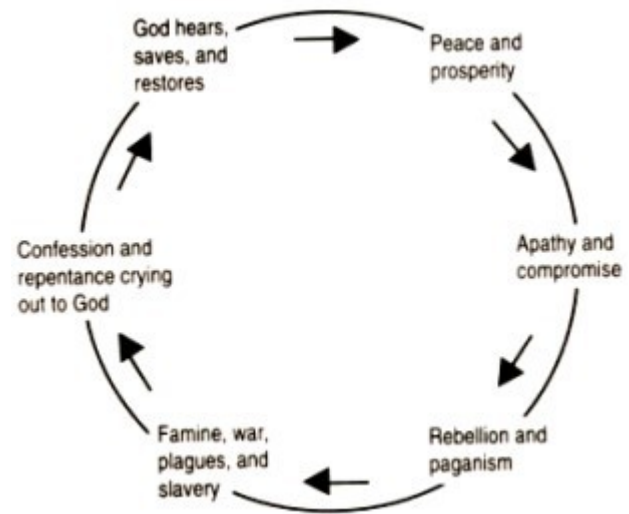
"Now we can see what they have brought about in the unprecedented and horrific scenes of mob violence, with homes and businesses going up in flames, and epidemic looting. ...These youths feel absolutely entitled to go 'on the rob' and steal whatever they want....

"What has been fuelling all this is not poverty...but moral collapse. What we have been experiencing is a **complete breakdown of civilized behavior** ..and at the very heart of these problems lies the **breakdown of the family**. ... [T]here are whole areas of Britain...where committed fathers are a wholly unknown phenomenon.... It's a world without any boundaries or rules. A world of emotional and physical chaos." [1]

A spreading addiction to depraved entertainment has magnified this moral and spiritual revolution. The chart below and the rest of this article explains **why** this is happening and **how** we can prepare for the challenges ahead.

"...when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them... your heart is lifted up and you forget the Lord your God.... you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'

"...if you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods... you shall surely perish. As the nations which the Lord destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the Lord your God." (Deut 8:10-20)



That warning is illustrated by this [cycle of Old Testament history](#) pictured here:

History's lessons

Centuries come and go, and history occasionally reveals sudden, **momentous changes that transform cultures in ways that defy human logic**. One of these astounding leaps **began about 400 years ago**. Its transforming power brought **light into the darkness** of the Middle Ages and safety to people bound by fear, superstition and tyranny.

Historian Randall Roth summarizes what happened. His research showed little variation in the rate of human violence between the 14th and the 16th centuries. "Then in the 17th century, there is a very big, dramatic drop," he says. "It's so sudden and rapid that it seems too hard to explain...."

Mr. Roth ought to know. From his base at Ohio State University, he had uncovered detailed documentation of 16th and 17th century murder rates which suggested "that countries don't become more or less civilized that quickly."

Journalist Alexander Stille explores this remarkable shift in his *New York Times* article, "Did Knives and Forks Cut Murders?" Basing his observations on studies done by historians during the last 60 years, he summarizes their findings:

"Although there were no national statistics centuries ago, some historians discovered that the archives of some English counties were intact back to the 13th century. So in the 1970's they began diligently counting indictments and comparing them with estimated population levels to get a rough idea of medieval and early modern crime rates.

"Historians in Continental Europe... came up with findings that yielded the same

surprising results: that murder was much more common in the Middle Ages than it is now and that it dropped precipitately in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries."^[2]

Why this drop? How did people suddenly become less violent?

These are important questions, for an accurate answer would also help nations deal with today's rising rate of violence.

So in his informative article, Mr. Stille cites some proposed answers to these crucial questions. One such explanation points to the social changes caused by industrialization and urbanization. But this theory was countered by James A Sharpe, a historian at the University of York in England. He showed that the "big statistical dip in violence *preceded industrialization and urbanization by more than a century.*"^[3]

Other explanations for the plummeting crime rates proved flawed as well. Some scholars have suggested that the nature of crime merely "shifted from bodily assault to crimes of property." But, wrote Mr. Sharpe, "The great **decline in homicide in the 17th century was not accompanied by a rise in property offense prosecutions** but rather by their diminution."

In other words, **theft as well as murder plummeted in the 17th century.** People had actually changed their values. They had become more honest as well as peaceable. But why?

Mr. Sharpe doesn't answer that question. Instead, he wrote that "this drop... remains inexplicable."

Tom Cohen, a history teachers at York University in Toronto, comes closer to solving the puzzle:

"Both the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation put a lot of emphasis on individual conscience... The conscience becomes the internal gyroscope. There is the growth of introspection... personal self-control..."^[4]

But while Mr. Cohen hints at the cause, he cloaks it in the humanist terms of today's progressive educator. Therefore, he can't explain how the "**conscience becomes the internal gyroscope.**"

Instead, Mr. Cohen's answer begs two more questions: How did the people suddenly develop their "individual conscience" and "personal self-control"? And how did their numbers grow to the point where cultures and nations actually reflected this personal transformation?

Ponder the Answer

The seeds of change were actually sown in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries by a few courageous reformers who dared to resist the corrupt religious establishment of their times. Willing to face persecution and death, men like...

- John Wycliffe: (England) - died in 1384, two years after translating the Bible into English),

- [Jan Hus](#) (Bohemia) - burned on the stake in 1415 in a fire lit with pages from Wycliffe's banned Bible,
- [John Foxe](#) (England) - 1587, who compiled the amazing stories in *Foxe's Book on Martyrs*) chose to follow their conscience and teach the life-changing truths that would -- by the 17th century -- transform northern Europe.

The surrounding culture didn't change overnight. The first sprouts from the seeds of the Reformation were still too few to accomplish a change in public consciousness. Many of the early Protestant churches were too closely tied to established traditions and state alliances to freely demonstrate the Christian life. They needed time to study God's Word, clarify the doctrines and define the unfamiliar terms. And their followers had to learn a lifestyle of faith that would resist and endure what the *Encyclopedia Britannica* called "savage persecution" involving the torture and death of "thousands of humble victims."^[5]

Their courage and commitment bore fruit. Persecution has always built faith rather than failure in God's flock. As Tertullian said back in the 1st century AD, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church."

By God's grace, people in northern Europe were suddenly free to print and read the Bible, live by faith and follow their conscience. A century later, the evangelistic zeal that spread God's truth and love throughout Europe began to cross seas and continents to reach the earth's most distant lands and oppressed people.

In the wake of this [mission movement](#) which grew quickly in the 19th century, nations were transformed. You might argue that financial exploiters and many colonial leaders served human greed and ambition. That's true. But faithful Christian missionaries did the opposite. They gave all they had -- comforts, security, health... in order to share God's love. Facing all kinds of dangers, they built hospitals, schools and churches in distant lands. And as they spread God's truths, moral standards and respect for human life, the world changed. The global slave trade ended, human violence ebbed, kindness and civility grew and travelers no longer feared for their lives.

Christianity had taught men to protect, not abuse, women. So in 1912, when the passengers of the sinking Titanic climbed into a limited number of lifeboats, "women and children came first." You may recall more recent ship and ferry accidents in which men trampled the women in their path in order to save their own lives. But when the Titanic hit the iceberg, most of the men demonstrated self-sacrificing kindness and old-fashioned chivalry:

"Lifeboats were quickly made ready and women and children were ordered to get into them first. There were 12 honeymooning couples on board the ship. Though all of the brides were saved, only one of the grooms survived."^[6] ["While 'Unsinkable' Titanic Sank, John Harper Preached](#)



A violent world was pacified by the spread of Christianity. But today we also see a reversal of that tide that first flooded Europe with God's Word. Many powerful leaders -- religious as well as political -- are now determined to snuff out the light of God's Word.

The new global education and human resource development systems are designed to replace the personal freedom we have in Christ with a collective society based on religious pluralism and global idealism. Aware of the rising wave of violence in schools and communities, they ban the only viable solution to rage and violence. ([Psalm 127:1](#) and [Isaiah 30:15](#)) As history repeats itself, the civilized world is regressing fast. Paganism, promiscuity,

deception and violent crime are on the rise, while the growing hatred for Biblical Christianity is fanned by a global media and entertainment industry that wants nothing more than the death of Biblical Truth and morality.

At such a time, **we need to remember that our God still reigns -- even in the midst of the rising evil. As we trust Him and follow His way, He will be our strength and refuge no matter how fierce the battles.**

"Thanks be to God who leads us in His triumph!" (2 Cor 2:14)
"...in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come... shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."
Romans 8:37-39

These Scriptures will help prepare your heart and mind: [Encouragement from A to Z](#)
See also [Preparing for Persecution](#) | [A New Way of Thinking](#)
[Purging the Memory of Our Christian Roots](#)
[Ban Truth - Reap Tyranny](#) | [Hope, Hate & Human Nature](#)

1. Melanie Phillips, "How the liberals ruined Britain," Daily Mail, August 11, 2011, <http://melaniephillips.com/how-the-liberals-ruined-britain>.
2. Alexander Stille, "Did Knives and Forks Cut Murders?" *The New York Times*, May 3, 2003.
3. While the source of this quote by James A. Sharpe is Alexander Stille's article (listed above), much more information can be found in the first chapter (written by Mr. Sharpe) in the book, *The Civilization of Crime: Violence in Town and Country Since the Middle Ages*. Written "by scholars from North America and Europe," it "demonstrates that both rural and urban communities in Sweden, Holland, England and other countries were far more violent during the late Middle Ages than any cities are today." (University of Illinois, 1996, back cover).
4. Eric A. Johnson (Editor), *The Civilization of Crime: Violence in Town and Country Since the Middle Ages* (University of Illinois, 1996) In chapter 1, Mr. Sharpe writes, "We have a number of samples of homicide statistics from the Middle Ages. These show massive variations in homicide rates...[but] a cluster of samples, however, suggest a typical thirteenth-century rate of around 18 to 23 per 100,000. We then have more samples to suggest that the rate dropped a little, perhaps to 15 per 100,000 in 1600, and then fell dramatically over the middle of the seventeenth century. This drop... remains inexplicable." (page 22)
5. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Volume 19 (Chicago: William Benton, 1968), page 48.
6. "While 'Unsinkable' Titanic Sank, John Harper Preached" at <http://www.christianity.com/ChurchHistory/11630699>