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### Итоги протестантского проекта: пятьсот лет спустя\*

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**Аннотация.** Пятьсот лет назад виттенбергский монах Мартин Лютер вывесил свои знаменитые 95 тезисов на двери Замковой церкви и тем самым дал старт рождению Новой Европы. Впрочем, даже не Новой Европы, а просто Европы. Поскольку именно с этого момента человечество стало свидетелем формирования уникальной европейской цивилизации и европейских ценностей, которые успешно просуществовали вплоть до сегодняшнего дня. Протестантский проект стал частью более фундаментального процесса — процесса всеобъемлющей рационализации всех сфер человеческой жизни, начавшегося в эпоху Нового времени. Капитализм явил собой рациональную экономическую систему, базирующуюся на прибыли. Идеи Джона Локка — рациональную либеральную общественно-политическую доктрину. Философия Рене Декарта — рациональное научное мировоззрение. Протестантизм в свою очередь стал рациональной системой ценностей, призванной преодолеть средневековый теоцентризм.

**Ключевые слова:** протестантизм, либерализм, рационализм, европейская система ценностей

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### Protestant Project: Five Hundred Years Later

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Five hundred years ago, the Wittenberg monk Martin Luther posted his famous Ninety-five Theses on the door of All Saints' Church, thus giving birth to the New Europe. That is, not even the New Europe, but simply Europe. For it is from this moment that humanity witnessed the formation of a unique European civilization and European values – values which have survived to this day. The Protestant project became part of a more fundamental process, namely, the process of the universal rationalization of all spheres of human existence, which heralded the beginning of the Modern Era. Capitalism emerged as a profit-based rational economic system. The ideas of John Locke were a rational liberal and political doctrine. And the philosophy of René Descartes offered a rational scientific worldview. Protestantism in turn became a rational system of values designed to overcome medieval theocentrism.

**Keywords:** protestantism, liberalism, rationalism, the European system of values

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## Origins of the Project

It is difficult to imagine a European in the 16th century who does not believe in God. But it was in the 16th century that active trade and entrepreneurial activity gained a foothold in Europe. The dogmatic Christianity of the Middle Ages had led the European people into a dead end: the Church condemned the accumulation of wealth and riches and, as is well known, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Christians also recalled the parable in which Jesus Christ expels the merchants from the Temple. The question arises: How can an honest Christian engage in entrepreneurship? The Protestants came up with an answer.

Liberalism, capitalism and Protestantism all became elements of a single puzzle that went by the name of "rationalism."

Of course, Protestantism also had an important political significance – it allowed Europeans to remain Christians while at the same time distancing themselves from the Vatican. From this point of view, Protestantism became the ideological basis for the formation of national European governments. More importantly, however, Protestantism reconciled Christianity with business, religious belief with capitalism. It proved to the everyday European that profit and wealth were not sins; quite the opposite, they were given by the grace of God.

It is sufficient to take a look at the political map of the world to see the connection between the Protestant worldview and the economic wellbeing of countries. The United States, Great Britain and Germany are among the largest economies in the world. They are also home to the largest Protestant populations. People living in countries whose population is mostly represented by other Christian denominations do not even dream about such wealth.

This link between religiosity and economic prosperity has been pointed out by numerous philosophers and sociologists in the past: Max Weber wrote about it in Germany in his famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, and the Russian Pyotr Chaadayev talked about the phenomenon in his country in his *Philosophical Letters*. It is noteworthy that this work brought Max Weber, who was writing from within the Protestant paradigm, global fame within the scientific community. Chaadayev, on the other hand, who lived in Orthodox Russia, was exiled and denounced as a madman...

## The Religion of the Secular Individual

As we know, Protestantism appeared in Europe during the Renaissance. The main aim of the Renaissance was to overcome medieval theocentrism and return to ancient anthropocentrism and humanism. In other words, the Renaissance represented a pushback against the 1000-year dominance of dogmatic Christianity with the construction of secular states and a secular worldview. In art, this manifested itself in the celebration of the human form; in economics it was the primacy of profit and financial gain; and in politics, it was the construction of a liberal society. Protestantism created a pseudo-Christian system that catered to the anthropocentric and humanistic aspirations of the European people. Liberalism, capitalism and Protestantism all became elements of a single puzzle that went by the name of "rationalism." Or, to put it slightly differently, they were "three sources and three component parts."

Figuratively speaking, Protestantism was a magic box with a crucifix, from which a maddeningly enchanting devil leapt. Formally, it was a new Christian denomination. In actual fact, it was a worldview that went against the very foundations of classical Christianity. How did this come about?

First. The rejection of Christian mysticism. Following the tendencies of the new European philosophy, Protestantism rejected irrational faith. "I understand in order to believe!" as Peter Abelard once wrote. And this became central to the philosophy of Protestantism. Understanding unseated belief, and rationalism took precedence over catharsis. The question thus arises: Can Religion exist without belief? Probably not.

Second. The ideas that created the concept of Protestantism – anthropocentrism and humanism. For a secular civilization, this manner of posing the question is quite natural. The same cannot be said for religion, however. Religion presupposes the primacy of the divine principle and rallies against humankind's accession to this pedestal. We can argue at length about whether this view is correct or not, but that is the essence of religious consciousness. By putting man in the place of Jesus Christ, Protestantism has distanced itself from the foundations of all religious systems.

Third. Sectarianism. We do not attribute any kind of value meaning to the term "sectarianism" here; it is axiologically neutral in our understanding.



The essence of sectarianism lies in the fact that sects only take instructions from themselves, and the interpretation of Christian dogmas (such as Protestantism) becomes individual and arbitrary. This would later clear the way for certain Protestant sects to carry out anti-Christian, and even sometimes illegal, activities.

By “liberalizing” Christianity, Protestantism solved the most important political and economic tasks facing society. But it paid too heavy a price – the abnegation of Christian morality itself.

Fourth. The abandonment of the Church led Protestantism to confuse the “earthly” with the “heavenly.” For traditional Christians, the perception of the Church as a door to the Kingdom of God is fundamental. The Church and its decoration are considered sacred. Everything from the priest’s garb and appearance to the hymns and clerical language signify a departure from everyday life, from earthly problems and attachments, and focus attention on the main thing – the idea of virtue and eternal life in Christ. Protestantism destroys this tradition, disguising preachers in Versace suits and moving services from temples and churches to clubs, offices and stadiums. But it is not just the form of sermons and prayers that is changing; their basic content is morphing too. While true Catholics and Orthodox Christians pray for the salvation of the soul, Protestants appeal with increasing regulatory for career advancement and financial prosperity.

Fifth, and most importantly, the rehabilitation of economic values and the accumulation of wealth and riches. In essence, this goes against the foundations of Christian morals, as well as the principles of any religious system. By definition, religion sees spirituality as singularly true, eternal and valuable, as opposed to the material principle, which is corporeal, “fabricated,” fleeting and “not real.” By “liberalizing” Christianity, Protestantism solved the most important political and economic tasks facing society. But it paid too heavy a price – the abnegation of Christian morality itself.

### Achievements and the Price Paid

Any alternative project (“Orthodox,” “Catholic,” “Islamic,” “Buddhist,” is meaningless, as it would take us back to the irrational Middle Ages.

Despite everything written above, it must be acknowledged that the Protestant project is one of the most successful and progressive in the history of humankind. However, success does not equate to the best, and progressive is not the same thing as moral. Be that as it may, the impressive results of the 500-year domination of the Prot-

estant worldview in Europe are undeniable. Economically speaking, Europe became a leading force and secured a dignified existence for its people. It managed to move away from “barbaric capitalism” and transition to “civilized capitalism,” with a high degree of social responsibility. In terms of politics, Europe managed to create a balanced liberal system with complex and highly effective mechanisms of checks and balances. In public life, Europe became a model of the highest standards of humanism and tolerance. Europe consistently defends the ideas of democracy, human rights, freedom and personal sanctity, and the rule of law. Finally, humankind is indebted to Europe for the scientific and industrial revolutions and for the scientific progress it has brought to the planet.

However, there is still a fly in the ointment here that is causing people to question the viability of the liberal project as a whole. As we have already mentioned, European civilization has rejected Christian morality, and this circumstance has deprived the European people of a firm footing for their worldview.

While post-war Europe was stewing in its own juices, not encountering any serious external challenges, the absence of Christian morality was not a critical issue. Morality was replaced by the rule of law, and the degradation of moral consciousness was more than compensated for by a sense of justice. When faced with more serious problems, however – international terrorism, the influx of migrants, the spread of radical Islam, the ambitions of “new Europeans” and the revival of nationalism and ethnic self-awareness – the vaunted liberal-Protestant values started to crack.

Europe was helpless in the face of external challenges, which did not bring it together (as one may have expected, given the experience of less “civilized” countries), but rather divided it. State individualism and political egotism reigned supreme. Europe was faced with an unpleasant dilemma: to either remain civilized and defend the principles of democracy, tolerance and liberalism, or sacrifice all this for the sake of self-preservation. Unfortunately, while Europe struggles to find a solution to this problem, time is working against it.

### Some Conclusions

It is logical to assume that the future of global civilization depends on a principled assessment of the consequences of the Reformation. In order to do this, we must answer a single



question: “Has the Protestant project run its course?” There are three possible answers here.

First, we can proceed from the notion that, despite the price paid and all the ideological imbalances, the Protestant worldview is still the most promising and justified. From this point of view, Protestantism can be seen as the most harmonious system of values, checks and balances, a system that ensures the stable development of society, rational politics and an effective economy. What is more, the Protestant project claims universalism, as it positions itself not so much as a religious worldview, but as a system of values in a secular state.

For the rest of the world, this means that any alternative project (“Orthodox,” “Catholic,” “Islamic,” “Buddhist,” etc.) is meaningless, as it would take us back to the irrational Middle Ages. And the sooner humanity accepts this and sets about the universal process of Reformation along the lines of the Western European model, the better.

Protestantism became the ideological basis for the formation of national European governments.

Second, a compromise position is possible, one in which Western European Protestantism is recognized as the only alternative, but one that is nevertheless open to reform. Such a “reformation of the Reformation” should be based on giving Protestantism a “human face” once again in the form of traditional Christian morals. Given the overall success of the Protestant project, this could be seen as the most preferable position. However, it is difficult to even suggest that the rest of world abandon its cultural, national and religious projects in favor of the liberal-Protestant project, which despite its apparent success in Western Europe is nevertheless completely foreign to the people in these countries. What is more, there is little evidence to suggest that the will or resources exist within Europe to reform the existing value system.

The third position can, theoretically, be formulated in the most general sense thus: the Western European Protestant movement has become obsolete and has no future.

In this case, the argument would go as follows: the European value system has ceased to be effective in the 21st century, which is evidenced by its helplessness in the face of contemporary global challenges. Europe is failing to cope with cultural and ethnic problems. The integrity of the continent is being put under question with increasing frequency, and the lack of Christian morals and religious values makes it weak and feeble. It is here where alternative projects that are capable of overcoming the “end of history” will come to the forefront. With all other things being equal, the consequences of this particular scenario are the least predictable.

For the Russian people, an analysis of the Protestant project is of fundamental importance in the context of Russia’s future development. I would not like to think that Russia is developing along the lines of “wherever the wind may take us.” What direction is Russia moving in? What does Russia want? What project is it implementing?

Russia’s tactics are inconsistent. Its strategy is amorphous. On the one hand, the Russian people accept most aspects of the Protestant project, focusing on Western European values – the commitment to democracy, human rights, a market economy and tolerance. On the other hand, we do not create favorable conditions for small and medium-sized businesses to operate effectively. Russia does not build civil society bodies and ignores the principle of the non-removability of power. We feel outrage when we sense interference in our lives, yet in certain situations, we do not shun such interference. We are against the arbitrary interpretation of international law, but we do the very same thing when it suits our needs. We advocate equality for all under the law, yet in practice encourage selective rights.

Finally, we cannot define our attitude towards Christian (Orthodox) morals. How do we position ourselves? As the custodians of true Christian medieval values? Or as the champions of a non-Christian utilitarian sense of justice in the 21st century?

