

# Why People Fall for Fake History

Students of the modern education system usually receive some version of the following historical tale of the West, [aptly summarized by scholar David Bentley Hart](#):

*“Once upon a time... Western humanity was the cosseted and incurious ward of Mother Church; during this, the age of faith, culture stagnated, science languished, wars of religion were routinely waged, witches were burned by inquisitors, and Western humanity labored in brutish subjugation to dogma, superstition, and the unholy alliance of church and state. Withering blasts of fanaticism and fideism had long since scorched away the last remnants of classical learning; inquiry was stifled; the literary remains of classical antiquity had long ago been consigned to the fires of faith, and even the great achievements of ‘Greek science’ were forgotten till Islamic civilization restored them to the West. All was darkness. Then, in the wake of the ‘wars of religion’ that had torn Christendom apart, came the full flowering of the Enlightenment and with it the reign of reason and progress, the riches of scientific achievement and political liberty, and a new and revolutionary sense of human dignity. The secular nation-state arose, reduced religion to an establishment of the state or, in the course of time, to something altogether separate from the state, and thereby rescued Western humanity from the blood-steeped intolerance of religion. Now, at last, Western humanity has left its nonage and attained to its majority, in science, politics, and ethics. The story of the travails of Galileo almost invariably occupies an honored place in this narrative, as exemplary of the natural relation between ‘faith’ and ‘reason’ and as an exquisite epitome of scientific reason’s mighty struggle during the early modern period to free itself*

*from the tyranny of religion. This is, as I say, a simple and enchanting tale, easily followed and utterly captivating in its explanatory tidiness..."*

According to Hart, there's only one problem with this familiar, post-Enlightenment historical narrative: "It happens to be false in every identifiably detail."

Yes, there was indeed a time after the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 A.D. (popularly known as the "Dark Ages"), in which much of the learning and institutions of the classical age experienced significant decline.

However, as Hart clarifies, "[T]he Middle Ages as a whole, especially from the time of the Carolingian Renaissance of the late seventh and early eighth centuries, were marked by considerable dynamism, in the arts, scholarship, engineering, agronomy, architecture, law, philosophy, and natural science..." The groundwork for many modern technological advances were also laid during this time.

Hart reminds us that it's no longer serious historians who peddle the false view of the Middle Ages and birth of the modern world. So why does it persist?

Because accurately reconstructing the past is difficult and painstaking work. It involves consulting largely unknown works, reading obscure texts in their original languages, and avoiding hasty generalizations. Most people have neither the time, nor talent, nor energy for it.

So they rely on select paragraphs in their history textbooks and journalistic presentations of the past. They content themselves with oversimplified narratives that confirm their biases. And as we know, one of the more stubborn biases of secular modernity is the idea that Christianity is anti-reason and anti-progress—which is why the above narrative is so

popular.

People have every right to conclude that Christianity's metaphysical claims are untrue, and that society should continue to move away from them. But there's no need to distort history to bolster that conclusion.

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