

The Parkdale Messenger

Weekly news and musings from
the little church moved by a Great Spirit

Toronto, ON

Sep 15th, 2017

No. 363

Worship this week:

PENTECOST

“Doing The Hokey Pokey”

Rev. Doug McLeod

Scripture:

Psalm 100
Romans 12: 1-8

with Europe—with catastrophic consequences. Theresa May’s explicit strategy in her negotiations with the EU to restrict the free movement of workers, limit migration, and pursue free trade deals in Asia all have surprising historical equivalents in the policies of a much earlier (and far wiler) ruler of England.

In February 1570, Queen Elizabeth I was formally excommunicated from the Catholic Church by Pope Pius V. The act was a long, drawn-out consequence of Elizabeth’s father Henry VIII’s formal split from Rome, following his divorce from his first wife and marriage to his second. It was a theological Brexit that labeled

Elizabeth illegitimate and branded her a heretic who had embraced the Reformation beliefs of Luther and Calvin. Protestant England was condemned as a rogue state isolated from the rest of predominantly Catholic Europe, and its exports were blocked in some areas. A theological iron curtain fell across the English Channel. Elizabeth faced imminent invasion and economic ruin. Her advisers counseled that the

only way to survive was to assume that your enemy’s enemy is your friend. So, Elizabeth reached out to the 16th-century global superpower also condemned by its papal adversary as heretical: Islam, and in particular the Ottoman Empire.

By the late 1570s, Elizabeth had developed an amicable correspondence with the Ottoman sultan Murad III, advising him that they both hated those idolatrous Catholics, and that she would be happy to act as his subject in return for a political and commercial alliance. Murad was rather perplexed—as we know from his advisers’ writings—to hear from a female ruler of a tiny country on the edge of Europe that he’d never heard of. But this was a time when Islam saw assimilation on its terms as a sign of its power rather than weakness (the empire was populated and partly run by Jews, Greeks, Armenians, Croats, and Serbs). Writing back to “Sultana Isabel,” Murad offered her English joint stock

❖ Calendar

Wednesdays – (1:00 pm) Prayer group at Doug’s office.

Sunday, Sep. 17th – (12:00 pm) “Recognition of Church Leaders”, followed by lunch and Sunday afternoon at the movies .

Tuesday, Sep. 19th – (6:00 pm) Free supper for the community.

Saturday, Sep. 23th – (12:00 pm) Knifty Knitters.

Sunday, Sep. 24th – (12:00 pm) Congregational meeting to amend the bylaws of Parkdale United Church Foundation.

Friday, Oct 20th - (two days) “Set Free Retreat” at the Alderwood United Church. See Rev. McLeod for more information.



An effigy of Queen Elizabeth I in Westminster Abbey, made by Maximilian Colt in 1603. Angelo Hornak / Getty

❖ Reflections

The First Brexit Was Theological

By Jerry Brotton

(Posting and pic, Sep. 13, 2017 on www.theatlantic.com)

As a British historian of the Tudor period, I knew it wasn’t completely right when some of my compatriots called Britain’s decision to leave the European Union unprecedented. It was the first time that an EU member state had voted to leave the bloc, but it wasn’t the first time Britain had renegotiated its relationship

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companies a commercial agreement, strictly on his terms.

Official papal policy was to excommunicate Christians trading with Muslims, but Elizabeth was now beyond such edicts. By the 1580s Elizabeth had a resident ambassador in Istanbul (then Constantinople) and consuls throughout North Africa and the Middle East, including in places like Aleppo and Raqqa. As reformed Protestants, many of them would have felt safer traveling in Muslim lands under Ottoman protection than in Catholic Europe, where arrest and the Inquisition invariably awaited them.

Elizabeth developed a pro-Ottoman policy that calls to mind Theresa May's recent military deals with Turkey. With characteristic pragmatism as well as a keen eye for symbolic revenge, Elizabeth stripped lead and tin from deconsecrated Catholic churches to export to the Ottomans as munitions in their wars with the Shia Persian empire— "which the Turk buys of them," wrote an outraged Spanish ambassador to England, "almost for its weight in gold, the tin being vitally necessary for the casting of guns and the lead for purposes of war." The trade was so successful that it was replicated in the Barbary states of North Africa, where again English armaments were traded for gold and sugar (hence Elizabeth's infamously bad teeth). English merchants also traveled as far as Persia, playing the Shah off against his Ottoman adversaries in a dangerous geopolitical game, aimed at neutralizing the Catholic threat of imminent Spanish invasion and keeping the ailing English economy afloat.

Nor was this a story limited to the realpolitik of the elite. Hundreds, possibly thousands of Elizabethans worked and lived in the Islamic world. All acknowledged Ottoman sovereignty and many converted to Islam, some under duress, others willingly, assuming that being Muslim would assure their survival more than Protestantism. One such individual was a merchant called Samson Rowlie, born in Norfolk but taken prisoner on a Turkey Company ship off Algiers in 1577. Samson was castrated and converted to Islam and became Hassan Aga the Chief Eunuch and Treasurer to the Ottoman ruler of Algiers. Conversion rarely went the other way, although various Moroccan trade delegations visited London throughout Elizabeth's reign; they were rarely impressed, and all were happy to return to their homelands.

Such a delicious mix of trade, religion, and politics soon caught the eye of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, and from the late 1580s the Elizabethan theater was full of Turks, Moors, Persians, and Saracens. Between 1579 and 1624, at least 62 plays emerged with Islamic characters, themes or settings. Many of these appear in some of the most influential plays of the period: Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, which includes burning the Koran onstage; Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, with its evil, scheming Moor, Aaron; the noble, melancholic Prince of Morocco in *The Merchant and Venice*; and of course, *Othello*. The enduring ambivalence audiences still feel toward the tortured Moor of Venice is a sign of the deliberate ambiguity that Shakespeare and other dramatists exploited in the portrayal of such characters.

Ultimately, the theological Brexit that led to this flowering of Anglo-Islamic relations was commercially unsustainable. The trade was too far and Elizabeth's successor King James I was more squeamish than her in pursuing such an alliance. In 1604 he signed the Peace of London, a treaty with Spain that ended Protestant-Catholic conflict and enabled the English to return to the heart of European trade and politics.

Today, the myth of Tudor England still runs deep in our political imagination. Two weeks after the Brexit vote, Lord Price, the British Minister for Trade and Investment, gave a speech in Hong Kong calling for "a second Elizabethan golden age of trade," claiming the first age "was based on peace, prosperity, new trading markets, and a flourishing of the arts." He should know that fake history is as pernicious as fake news. Any Tudor historian would tell him this was a time of famine, economic depression, and political authoritarianism.

❖ Thank you to

- Ernie Wilmot for the flowers of the altar table.
- **All those who support our small food bank!**

For information or if you want to post something in The Parkdale Messenger, please contact us:

parkdale.messenger@rogers.com