

## Book Review



The Closing of the Western Mind  
*The rise of faith and the fall of reason.*

*By Charles Freeman: Published by William Heinemann 0-434-00853-2*

A Book about Philosophy, Theology and History may not be your one you automatically take from the book shelf, but if you have any interest into the early church, and the story of the faith we profess today then this easy to read book will be a challenging read.

The first thing to say Freeman writes his book as History, from a historical perspective, certainly not a Christian one and I don't think a philosophical one. He begins by setting the early church in it's Greek, philosophical context of the Eastern Mediterranean, takes us through the early church as it defines itself through controversies, such as the Arian and Pelagian and 'heresies' Gnostic and Montanist? It looks at the characters of Paul, Augustine and Constantine amongst others, and argues a that a Church born out of Greek free philosophical thought, became a doctrine of 'faith' linked to political power that actually stifled human development until the Age of Enlightenment and the Renaissance.

“Yet Christianity grew in a world in which a tradition of debate was deeply rooted .....The Christians required a uniformity of thought in order to maintain the coherence of their movement but this proved impossible to achieve.....Augustine saw only one orthodox Christianity but eighty heretical ones. The number is in itself a tribute to the fertility of the Greek mind and shows how unlikely it was that a consensus on doctrine would ever have been achieved through discussion alone.....Constantine appreciated the advantages of integrating Christianity into the state. This was a far-seeing move in that it aimed to avoid the debilitating effects of persecution and widened the potential support for an empire under stress.” (1.)



The result of this Freeman argues was, "Christianity becoming an exclusive and authoritarian" (2.) religion which the gospels in themselves do not support? A religion engaged in determining boundaries as opposed to the Greek world of pushing boundaries.

Here is a book that asks question of the faith we profess today, where it came from? How we came to be part of it? It does challenge us with the History that played a part in the doctrine we profess today and gives an interesting insight into the early church and its first 300-400 years that shaped us today as well as exploring the historical relationship with Church and state.

Rev Neil Eldridge

1. Charles Freeman, The Closing of the Western Mind The Rise of faith and the fall of reason, Published by William Heinemann 2002 pg 141

2. pg 140



### Reformed Theology and Theologians (3)

Czech religious teacher much influenced by the writings of John Wycliffe. Many of his teachings anticipated those of the Reformation. He was burned at the stake in 1415 but became a national hero. The Bohemian Brethren, following his teachings, emphasised Christian discipline, rejected military service and private property and generally stood for a pure and simple Christian life. Their modern successors are the Moravian Church.