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# Protestants All Agree on This: Somebody Laid an Egg!

*This article is dedicated to Protestant traditionalists of all kinds who are firmly convinced their spiritual forefathers paved "The Way" to Heaven for them. As a bonus, that dedication even includes those Protestant Pretenders who, contrary to the Truth restored by the Protestant Reformers, believe absolute Truth concerning the meaning of Scripture is unattainable. May the "path" they follow take them where their "heart" would have them go. May they and those who believe them receive the eternal reward they so richly deserve.*

Have you ever gotten lost? Didn't know where you were? Spent a lot of time wandering around looking for something familiar? Wondering what to do next? No? Me neither. Well, maybe once or twice when I was a kid. But if you sometimes get the feeling the Church is in that predicament today, take off your coat and sit a spell. Have I got a story to tell! It's a tale about how the Church lost *The Way* and split up into little bitty groups, each one going its own separate way, thinking its leader had somehow found *The Way* back.

Do you know anything about the Protestant Reformation? Philip of Hesse, Henry VIII, and Frederick III the Wise? You know, the fuss that went on in Europe during the 1500s? The ruckus started by the likes of Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli? They were called "Protestants" because they *protested* against some of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church.

Their *protest* has been called a "re-formation" because they first set out to *reform* the Catholic Church from within. But actually, it should be called a "restoration" because their *reform* effort ended when they left the Catholic Church. At that point they established *Protestant* churches in which they sought to *restore* the doctrines and practices the Church had held in an earlier time—doctrines and practices they contended the Roman Catholic Church had long since either lost or distorted.

Guess what happened after the leaders of the Protestant Reformation let the cat out of the bag by telling everybody the Church had *lost* some crucial doctrines and practices? You got it. Those who believed that bit of information wanted those doctrines and practices back. Do you know what else? Not everybody in the Protestant Church agreed on exactly what crucial doctrines and practices had been lost, much less how to go about *restoring* them.

## **HISTORY AND CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY**

### **Puritans and Pretenders: Cyprian, Novatian, and the Lapsed**

*This is the second in a series of articles concerning HISTORY AND CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY. This article was written by Michael H. Clay of **The Voice of Elijah** and edited by Larry D. Harper of **The Elijah Project**. Articles in this series will investigate specific aspects of Church history and the progression of Christian orthodoxy for the information of those seeking to understand the origins of modern Christianity.*

The Church today willingly accepts all comers solely on the basis of a simple profession of faith. Pretenders walk in the church door, wallet in hand and are met with open arms. Though it's been that way for centuries, it wasn't so at first. The awful precedent was set way back in the third century as the outcome of one of the greatest persecutions the Christian Church has ever known. That particular persecution, initiated by the Roman Emperor Decius in A.D. 250, led to an internal battle for Christian orthodoxy that finally resulted in a massive influx of Pretenders into what had shortly before been a highly purified Body of Christ.

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## Letters to the Editor

As I was preparing to write this column, I started thinking about the information we have published in *The Voice of Elijah* over the last year. I hope it has been valuable to you in your walk with God. It certainly has been for all of us here.

The January 1993 issue laid some extremely important groundwork. It showed us there was indeed a coherent *Teaching* available to the Early Church, but that *Teaching* was subsequently lost with the help of men like Clement of Alexandria, and especially Origen. These men opened the floodgates for speculation regarding the *meaning* of the Scriptures, and much to Satan's liking, the speculation has continued into our day.

In the issues which followed, articles such as "Watching Ducks Sashaying 'Round the CornerStone" (April 1993), "Counterfeiters, Con Artists (and the Consummate Consumer)" (July 1993) and "The Natural Man Is an Idiot (When It Comes to the Truth)" (October 1993) challenged us to examine our personal relationship with God. We have been encouraged to take a hard look at what we believe and determine whether our beliefs are based on a rational examination of evidence rather than blind adherence to tradition.

Those are important topics to consider if one desires to come to God on His terms rather than their own. If you are a new subscriber, I encourage you to order these back issues and read them. If you have already read them, I encourage you to re-read them. I am sure you will benefit from doing so.

### *It's Here!*

On another subject, new subscribers to this publication may not be aware that The Elijah Project held a seminar in October for the Monthly Contributors to *The Voice of Elijah*. That seminar, titled *The Way, The Truth, The Life*, was a big success from our perspective. During the two days of teaching, many things we had wondered about fell into place. As our readers have discovered, each issue of *The Voice of Elijah* and *The Voice of Elijah Update* gives insight into some new piece of the puzzle that is hidden in the Scriptures. But all too often, space and time limitations don't allow those pieces to be pulled together as much as we would like. We've been told that will only be done in the books that will be published by The Elijah Project. The seminar was an excellent forum for presenting some of the information that will eventually be found in those books, especially the information in *The Mystery of Scripture*. It helped us all to see the big picture that is forming as we learn more and more of what God has done throughout history.

The seminar also allowed some of our readers the opportunity to meet *The Voice of Elijah* volunteers who have been working hard to get our publications out to them each month. That was beneficial to our volunteers as well. Sometimes it is easy to lose sight of those we are trying to reach when we are completely immersed in the many projects that are currently underway or on the drawing board. And it was nice to finally put some faces to the names of those who had been following this publication for several years. (It's hard to believe we're starting our fourth year!)

If you missed the seminar, you should know *The Voice of Elijah* is now offering audio cassette tapes of the seminar (which will be shipped in February) for those of you who are interested in learning more of *The Teaching*. The 8-tape set also comes with an illustrated syllabus. As one of the seminar attendees said:

*"This was a terrific means to get a head start on what The Elijah Project is teaching. Now I can go back and read what's been written in the newsletters and books with better understanding."*

M.H. — Plano, TX

This seminar tape set is great for everyone—those who are new to *The Voice of Elijah* as well as those who have been with us since our first issue in October 1990. It is also valuable for those who have been wanting to understand more about what we believe. As I have shared with you in the past, we are often asked about that. So if you have wondered what we believe, I definitely recommend you listen to the seminar tapes. They provide an excellent overview of many topics that have been discussed in these pages over the past three years. Look for the seminar package on the Order Form at the back of this issue.

### **New Year's Resolutions**

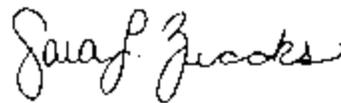
Our new subscriber drive has already kicked into high gear. January is typically the best time of year for sending direct mail to prospective subscribers. Consequently, by the time you receive this issue we will have already mailed out tens of thousands of pieces, with more in the works. We are planning to mail out twice the number of pieces we usually send each month as long as funds allow. We have also redesigned the mailer we have used for over a year. Hopefully, the new, easier-to-follow format will increase the response rate. Our goal is to double our current subscriber base by the end of this year.

We are also hoping to double the number of Monthly Contributors in 1994. Toward that end, you will soon be receiving some information from Michael Clay, our Executive Editor, explaining the benefits of becoming a Monthly Contributor. When reviewing that information and making your decision, please keep in mind that without our Monthly Contributors, it is likely you never would have received our mailer and had opportunity to become a subscriber yourself. Their monthly contributions enable us to maintain our current level of outreach. So if the insight you have received through reading *The Voice of Elijah* is valuable to you, I ask you to support our efforts to reach others like yourself by becoming a Monthly Contributor.

There are several other projects waiting in the wings, not the least of which is a topical index to the newsletter. We originally hoped to include the index in this issue. However, other projects—editing the seminar tapes being one of them—have had to take precedence. Hopefully, we will be able to get back to work on the index once *The Mystery of Scripture* is published a little later this year.

Before I close, I want to thank you for your continued support of this ministry. With every year that passes, we draw closer to the End and it becomes paramount that we reach others with *The Teaching*. Your support is what makes this ministry grow. May you have a joyous new year.

In Him,



P.S. Some of you may be wondering what happened to the article on Søren Kierkegaard that Larry mentioned he would write for this issue. Well, you know what they say about the best-laid plans. Larry usually does not know what he will submit to *The Voice of Elijah* until he has time to think about it and then takes the time to sit down to write the article. His current topic of research usually triggers some immediate thought that he decides to share with our subscribers. That was the case with "Protestants All Agree on This: Somebody Laid an Egg!" I am sure you will agree it is valuable reading for us all. ■

## Protestant

*From Page 1*

Seeing that the Catholic Church had lost *The Way* was the easy part. Finding *The Way* back proved to be somewhat more difficult. What was it God originally intended His Church to adhere to? Grebel disagreed with Zwingli. Zwingli disagreed with Luther. Luther disagreed with Calvin and just about everybody else. But by the time the leaders of the Protestant Reformation were through bickering about it, they had already set the precedent. If you don't agree with your fellow Protestants, just split! Take off in some new direction! So guess what? We Protestants have been at it ever since. No, I'm not *talking about* the splitting, although we've certainly done enough of that. I'm *talking about* the *restoring*.

### **“Restoration of long-lost Truth is a time-honored Protestant tradition.”**

The Protestant Church has been splitting up into splinter groups for nearly 500 years now because the Protestant *Restoration* has never ended. That's because some zealous new visionary has always come along trying to wake everybody up to the fact that the Church is not yet what God intended His Church to be. And the established Protestant churches have always had the same negative reaction to those new zealots as the Catholic Church had to Luther, Calvin and Zwingli: “Out! Out! And good riddance! Just don't take anyone with you.” So the zeal for a Protestant *Restoration* has continued all this time, long after the Protestant *Reformation* ended. And controversy has continued in its wake.

Did I mention zealous new visionaries trying to wake everybody up to the fact that something more needed to be *restored* to the Church? That's me. God called me to do it. To *restore* what the Church lost, I *mean*. I'm not going to

start any new church group, so it doesn't matter much to me whether you wake up or not. I don't stand to gain anything. But I've got to do what I've got to do. God knows I wouldn't do it if I didn't have to. Maybe you didn't know it, but God does not take much lip from those He calls. So I'll be around awhile, doing what needs to be done. You may disagree with what I'm doing. If so, take the matter up with God. I'm not much interested in what anyone thinks, one way or the other.

Lest you think I'm some wild-eyed gnat in a hurricane, however, I thought I'd pass along a bit of historical information you might not have heard before. It occurred to me you ought to know that Protestants who try to discredit my *restoration* efforts are rejecting their own Protestant heritage—be it Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Christian, Pentecostal, etc.

I don't mind Protestant folks disagreeing with what I teach. That's their God-given prerogative. It's the rejection of what I'm trying to do that doesn't ring true. After all, *restoration* of long-lost Truth is a time-honored Protestant tradition. Maybe they don't know that. But I do, and being the *orthodox* Protestant that I am, I wouldn't want to break with that tradition now, would I?

### **Take a Look at This!**

First, let's *talk* a bit *about* the churches that came out of the Protestant Reformation. Perhaps you didn't know the various Lutheran churches of our day all have their origin in Germany, in the one man Martin Luther, the Father of the Protestant Reformation.

The first-generation Lutherans believed Luther had *restored* lost Truth to their Protestant Church. The Lutheran Church has since that time ostensibly sought to maintain the Truth Martin Luther recovered, although most Lutherans today don't actually believe the same things Luther believed. That's the way it is with tradition, it sometimes gets all twisted and distorted by those who come along later. But traditionalists don't care, they just like the fact that it's tradition. Maybe you didn't know tradition provides mental security for people who are too lazy to think for themselves. Now that wasn't very nice, was it? Oh well,

too late. I've already written it down, and I don't like to edit.

The beliefs of the Reformed churches, on the other hand, originated in Switzerland, in the beliefs of the two men John Calvin and Huldreich Zwingli. You've probably heard of Calvin, perhaps not Zwingli. Both held similar views, but Calvin was the more prolific writer. Therefore, he has gotten the most credit. Both were influential in turning the formerly Catholic Switzerland into a Protestant state. They did so by claiming they were *restoring* biblical Truth that had been known to the Church in an earlier time.

I say Calvin and Zwingli turned Switzerland from a Catholic state to a Protestant state because back then entire countries were either Catholic or Protestant. There was no separation of church and state as there is today. That came later. In the sixteenth century, the Church was the state and one became a citizen of the state through infant baptism.

That's where the Mennonites come in. They take their name from the one man Menno Simons (c. 1496–1561), who carried on the *restoration* efforts of Conrad Grebel (1498?–1526). Grebel split off from Zwingli to found the Anabaptist movement in 1525 because he rejected infant baptism and the church-state concept of the Reformed Church. He insisted instead that the true Church was a free church comprised only of those who joined through Believer's baptism.

### **“The Protestant Church has been splitting up into splinter groups for nearly 500 years now because the Protestant Restoration has never ended.”**

Conrad Grebel's radical (at the time) concept of the separation of church and state later became a fundamental tenet of the Constitution of the United

***“Because of its less than auspicious beginnings, the English Reformation was at first a reformation more in name than in substance.”***

States. That contention and his insistence that the original Church knew only Believer’s baptism also provided the basis for all those “Baptist” churches and “Free” churches. Get it? Baptist churches believe in Believers’ baptism. Free churches believe the Church should be “free” from any state church.

The Presbyterian churches of today trace their origin back to Scotland and one man, John Knox (c. 1514–72). For the most part, these folks hold the same doctrines as the Reformed churches. That’s because John Knox studied Calvinism in Switzerland. Their name, however, comes from the biblical term *presbyter* (“elder”). This group believed they had *restored* the true *presbyterian* form of government that existed in the Apostolic Church.

Like all the other segments of Protestantism we have mentioned thus far, the Presbyterians have their roots directly in the *restoration* efforts of the first-generation Protestant Reformers. That is not the case with the Protestant churches established by those Reformers who carried on the *restoration* effort after them.

### ***The Puritan Call for Restoration***

The Protestant Reformation came to England as the result of the not altogether religious desires of Henry VIII. Although the Act of Supremacy in 1534 declared him to be “the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England,” he had other than religious reasons for wanting that title. He needed a son to reign after him, and the Pope would not grant him a divorce so that he might gain one through a woman other than his current wife. Consequently, he replaced the Pope with one more to his liking, one who would grant his request for a divorce. He more or less established himself as Pope over the Church of England.

Henry got the son he wanted. But because of its less than auspicious beginnings, the English Reformation was at

first a *reformation* more in name than in substance. The Catholic Church in Henry’s realm merely changed its name to the Church of England, and things went on more or less as they had before, although to his credit Henry did curb some of the more extravagant abuses of the priesthood.

Henry’s religious expediency, however, created a lingering desire for a more complete *restoration* in the hearts of many of his subjects. That lingering desire to recover what the Catholic Church was thought to have lost eventually found its way to the New World, carried there by English colonists. Once there, it exploded into *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*. (That’s the title of a book edited by Richard T. Hughes. See below.)

When Elizabeth I came to the throne of England in 1558, she brought an end to a horrendous five-year period of persecution in which her predecessor, Mary I, had sought to reverse the English Reformation and restore England to the Catholic fold. With Elizabeth’s ascendancy to the throne, English Protestants breathed a sigh of relief and looked forward with high hopes of seeing the Church of England *restored* to the Church’s former purity.

Thus began a century (1560–1660) in which many pious English souls repeatedly saw their yearnings for a more thorough *reformation* of the Church of England frustrated. By the end of that century (1660), the Church of England was still the most conservative and traditional of all the Protestant churches. And those English zealots still calling for *reformation* were looking more and more to

the New World to see their *restoration* hopes fulfilled.

Those in the Church of England who openly identified themselves with the call for an English Church based on personal spiritual commitment to God and an honest desire to see the long-lost Truth of the Apostolic Church *restored* were contemptuously referred to by the majority in the Church of England as “Puritans.” In the words of one of their own, they sought “for the reform of Reformation itself” (John Milton).

The spiritual life of the Puritans focused on the experience of the “new birth.” Therefore, their movement has sometimes been likened to a revival, which in one sense it was. But it would be a mistake to view it only in that light.

The Puritans’ objective was a continuation of the Protestant *Reformation*. They were not just concerned with spiritual revitalization, they wanted to *restore* the whole Truth of the Scriptures to the Church. However, different groups of Puritans had different ideas as to what that Truth was and how to accomplish its *restoration*. Many Puritan leaders, especially those educated at the University of Cambridge, had been heavily influenced by Calvinist theology as mediated to them through the Scottish Presbyterians. These leaders preferred to remain part of the Church of England so that they could work to *restore* the *presbyterian* form of church government from within.

On the other hand, other Puritan leaders held views similar to the Anabaptist beliefs concerning separation of church and state. These believed the individual “congregation” was to be an independent body. Not surprisingly, the Puritans who believed this became known as “Congregationalists” or “Independents.”

There were also two different types of “Independents.” Using the freedom that the Church of England accorded individual parishes, some of the Independent Puritans established separate congregations but continued to claim affiliation with the Church of England. These Independents have been called

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***“Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, Mennonite, Congregational, and Baptist churches were all established by Christians who were trying to restore some Truth they believed the established Church of their day had lost.”***

“Nonseparatists” to distinguish them from their Puritan next of kin, the “Separatists.”

The Separatists strongly believed the Church should be completely separate from the state. They flatly rejected the notion of a state church and wanted nothing to do with it. So they “separated” from the Church of England. State churches being what they were at the time, these folks were soon forced into exile. In the early years of the Puritan Reform effort, most English Separatists went as exiles to the Netherlands. In later years, they migrated to North America.

In 1608 one such group of English Separatists, led into exile by John Smyth, established the first English Baptist church. At the time, these English Baptists were living in Amsterdam. In 1620, Puritans who had formerly been associated with this early group of Baptists journeyed on to the New World in a ship called the “Mayflower.” These Separatist “Pilgrims” established the Plymouth Colony. However, it was only later, in 1639, that Roger Williams (see below) established the first Baptist church in America (at Providence).

As the Puritan efforts at *reformation* dragged on, some Nonseparatists began to give up hope of ever reforming the Church of England. One such group set out for North America to establish their

***“The driving force behind the call for a continued restoration effort came from the English Puritans who were seeking to restore their own perceived version of Scriptural Truth.”***

own Independent church based on Congregational principles. In 1629, these Puritans established the Massachusetts Bay Colony and, although Independent, continued to claim affiliation with the Church of England. Needless to say they did so because the religious-political situation of their day was much more complex than can be explained here.

So, what have we seen so far? Only that the Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, Mennonite, Congregational, and Baptist churches were all established by Christians who were trying to *restore* some Truth they believed the established Church of their day had lost. However, the driving force behind the call for a continued *restoration* effort came from the English Puritans who were seeking to *restore* their own perceived version of Scriptural Truth.

We have also seen that two groups of these English Puritan Reformers were among the first to establish settlements on the shores of North America in the 1620s. Should we find it any wonder then that some of them continued their search for the *restoration* of the long-lost Truth of the Apostolic Church after they came to the New World? Would you find it any great surprise to learn that their *restoration* mentality shaped the cultural mind-set of what has since become the greatest nation on Earth?

In case you want to study the Protestant *restoration* effort in America in more detail, I refer you to the book edited by Richard T. Hughes that I mentioned earlier—*The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988). I highly recommend it for those who would like to better understand why the American Protestant Church is what it is today. All I’ve done here is take some information out of the greater mass of material you can find publicly recorded in that book. However, my conclusions are not always the same as those you find presented there. They are, for the most part, my own.

### ***The Massachusetts Bay Experiment***

The Nonseparatist Puritans who founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1629 did so with the overt intention of establishing a new Zion—“a city set on a hill”—that would, by the sheer force of its success, lead to the reformation of the Church of England. They were totally committed to the idea of *restoring* the apostolic pattern of church government:

*Once reform-minded immigrants found themselves in a congenial setting far from persecuting bishops, they turned in a hundred ways to recovery of first-times ordinances. Their most visible and sweeping feat was construction of a Congregationalist church order.*

(Hughes, *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, Univ. of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1988, p. 26)

*Negatively expressed, the governing aim in every case was to make the fullest possible withdrawal from the Catholic and Anglican error of “human invention”; in positive terms the authors aspired to the clearest possible display of the “form and pattern of Government” imparted in scriptural narrative of the first Christian churches.*

(*Ibid.*, p. 27)

*And at all times, perhaps excepting the brief Massachusetts governorship of Henry Vane (1636–37), the dominant intellectual leaders remained dedicated to an “apostolic” Christianity formed along Congregationalist lines.*

(*Ibid.*, pp. 29–30)

These idealistic folk were soon forced to face reality in the New World. There is one simple but intransigent problem that all erstwhile Protestant Re-

***“Roger Williams was in no way the last Protestant zealot to issue anew the call for the complete restoration of the long-lost Truth of the Apostolic Church.”***

formers have encountered in attempting to *restore* the Truth of Apostolic Christianity that the Church somehow lost along the way. It lies in the fact that not all people, when confronted by what one Reformer sees as an incontrovertible preponderance of evidence, will choose to be swayed by that evidence. These “unbelievers” have always posed a distinct problem for the *restoration* effort, especially when the Church was the state, as it was at Massachusetts Bay.

Thus we find that before long, one extreme Separatist by the name of Roger Williams ran afoul of the Nonseparatists governing the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He did not agree that those colonists had taken the Reformation far enough. They had not “separated” the Church from the world. Therefore, he wanted them to continue their *restoration* effort. In his case, he apparently wanted what the Apostle Paul wanted—a church completely without “spot or wrinkle” (Eph. 5:27):

*Without exaggeration we can say that Williams's life was dominated by this search for “lost Zion,” that his overriding passion was the quest for God's pure church.*  
(*Ibid.*, p. 33)

How could any individual be faulted for those desires? Perhaps because of his manner of dissent (too zealous)? Perhaps because those with whom he disagreed weren't as much interested in *restoration* as they were in not disturbing their relations with the King of England, the individual who had granted them a patent on their land? Then again, perhaps they actually weren't all the “good Christian folk” they claimed to be? Roger Williams certainly didn't think so.

To their credit, however, the colonists at Massachusetts Bay didn't execute their reform-minded nemesis as some earlier English rulers had done. They merely banished him from their colony, to live a life of isolation in the

North American wilderness of the seventeenth century (1636). Just as an added footnote to this particular episode in the Protestants' call for the continuation of the Reformation, in 1684 the English government forced the Massachusetts Bay colonists to abandon the church-state scheme they had initially established. That fact only serves to accent the exiled Williams' charge against them:

*A central theme ... was the charge that reformation was incomplete in Massachusetts, that Puritans had failed to separate the church from the world and thus restore the purity of the first age.*  
(*Ibid.*, p. 34)

What did Williams believe the true Church should be? He identified four characteristic marks:

1. It was comprised of only those who had experienced an authentic conversion in which they had turned to God in complete repentance.
2. Its members made every effort to observe, in “simplicity and purity,” all God's “ordinances and appointments,” turning away from all “inventions of men” that had been introduced into Church practices.
3. It was always the few True Believers rather than the multitude who attended church services. Its members were “content with a poor and lowly condition in worldly things.”
4. Its spiritual government was never mixed with civil government.

What could the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony possibly have faulted in those four points? Very definitely the last. Their grand experiment was based on the church-state system of government. In adopting that concept they merely added fuel to the still-glow-

ing English embers that remained alive from the raging fires of the Protestant Reformation. It would not be long before those banked coals roared to life again in the two Great Awakenings. When they did, however, the emphasis would not be so much on *restoring* church polity and theology. The stress would instead be on *restoring* individual and collective devotion to God.

Roger Williams was in no way the last Protestant zealot to issue anew the call for the complete *restoration* of the long-lost Truth of the Apostolic Church. He was, however, perhaps the least productive in that he established only a single Baptist church and indeed seems to have left that church for good in 1639. He appears to have fallen victim to his own pessimistic view of the condition of the Church in his day. He ultimately came to believe the Church had lost all apostolic authority for gathering itself into congregations.

***“Williams believed the Church had first experienced a ‘time of Purity’ during the Apostolic Age.”***

The writings of Roger Williams are *significant* in that they serve to illustrate the basic contention of all the Protestant Reformers, not only those who preceded him but also those who followed (although not all Reformers who came later appear to have been as well informed as he concerning Early Church history). Williams believed the Church had first experienced a “time of Purity” during the Apostolic Age. However, that period of faithfulness to God was soon followed by a “time of Transgression and Apostacy” which continued in the Church up to his own day.

***“Williams established no separate denomination as did other Protestant zealots like Luther, Calvin, or Knox because, except for the one time, he refused to gather Believers into churches.”***

Protestant Reformers have all held basically the same view, although they have attributed the Apostasy of the Church to various causes and have placed its fall at different times in history. In Williams' case, as in the case of the Anabaptists before him, the beginning of Christianity's decline was assigned to the Roman Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity and his attempts at christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 312–337). Williams' view is not surprising in that he and other Anabaptists rejected the notion of a state church, and Christianity first became a state religion during the rule of Constantine.

***“Like Williams, Wesley also thought the Church had lost the apostolic authority the Catholic and Anglican Churches claimed.”***

Williams' view of the matter was straightforward. He believed the Church had lost the apostolic authority to establish churches as a direct result of Constantine's intervention. Hence, the true Church was now scattered in the “Wilderness of Desolation” and would only be gathered in the millennium. In the meantime, it was the role of “witnesses” like himself to bring attention to the Church's miserable situation and save individual souls through proclamation of the Gospel.

Williams established no separate denomination as did other Protestant zealots like Luther, Calvin, or Knox because, except for the one time, he refused to gather Believers into churches. It is therefore difficult to assess what impact

he had on individual beliefs even in his own time. It is known, however, that he found many in both England and America who were willing to listen to him propound his views.

### ***Methodists and the First Great Awakening***

The Methodist Church is the legacy left us by another of those ranting, raving Protestant Reformers. Not content to leave well enough alone, an English fellow named John Wesley (1703–1791) began preaching hell-fire and damnation on the city streets of England just over a century after the colonists exiled Roger Williams for his pessimistic zealotry. The year was 1739. This time however, the Reformer was not so disinclined to assemble True Believers. By the time of Wesley's death (1791), there were over 72,000 Methodists in Great Britain and Ireland, along with more than 47,000 in the newly independent United States of America.

What prompted John Wesley to engage in public preaching and in exhorting sinners to turn to God in repentance? The first was his personal knowledge of the new-birth experience. But there was also this matter of *restoring* the Church to the position from which he claimed it had long since fallen. Not content to merely talk about *restoration*, Wesley put his words into action. This time, the zealot gained a fair hearing and thousands responded to his fervent message of salvation.

As I explained in a previous article, Wesley was influenced directly by the Moravian Brethren. (See “One Train. One Track. Two Rails.” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1992.) Moreover, it is also known that he agreed with the views of the German historian Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714), whose writings were favored by both Mennonites and Brethren. As I mentioned earlier in this article, the Mennonites have an Anabaptist ori-

gin and believed the Church should be separate from the state. The Brethren, on the other hand, originated in Lutheran Pietism.

Arnold's writings appealed to the Mennonites and Brethren because they contained a written declaration of the charges their own forebearers had leveled at the state churches—Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed—of their own day. The historian Arnold echoed the statements Roger Williams had made concerning the fallen character of the Church. Like Williams, Arnold attributed the fall of the Church to the fact that it had gradually become a state church, beginning at the time of Constantine.

When John Wesley sailed with a group of colonists to Georgia in 1735, he took along a copy of Arnold's *True Portrayal of the First Christians* (1696), in which Arnold stated his views concerning the fall of the Church. Although Wesley agreed with Williams and Arnold in their contention that the Church had strayed from its early faithfulness to God, he believed the fall had occurred much earlier than the time of Constantine. Therefore, he sought to take the *restoration* back to a time earlier than the beginning of the fourth century.

Wesley even looked favorably on the heretical Montanists of the second century because he saw in them a Christian vitality he admired. Indications are he thought the orthodox Church was somehow already going astray when it excluded the Montanist believers.

Like Williams, Wesley also thought the Church had lost the apostolic authority the Catholic and Anglican Churches claimed. Not as pessimistic in his outlook however, Wesley took the true apostolic succession to be the continued apostolic witness of individual Believers:

*He saw his revival as a providential corrective to the formalism and moralism of the national church; he sincerely believed that the Methodist gospel of grace (“repentance, faith*

**“There can also be little doubt that the Protestant Reformers’ desire for restoration of the Church to the vitality it had once known found expression in the phenomenon that has since come to be known as the revival.”**

*and holiness”) was a recovery of apostolic doctrine—still another reform of the Reformation. (Ibid., pp. 132–133)*

So it was that another radical Protestant Reformer came along contending that the Early Church had somehow lost the Truth that he intended to restore to the Church of his day:

*There can be no doubt that for Wesley, Apostolic Christianity was normative or that its restoration continued as an ideal for him and his people. (Ibid., p. 134)*

There can also be little doubt that the Protestant Reformers’ desire for restoration of the Church to the vitality it had once known found expression in the phenomenon that has since come to be known as the *revival*. I have already explained that the call for revival did not originate with John Wesley. He was merely echoing the Moravian Brethren who had been influenced by the writings of the German Pietist Johann Arndt (1555–1621). Arndt, in turn, had been influenced by pious Catholic writers before his time. (See “One Train. One Track. Two Rails.” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1992.)

Wesley was somewhat unique, however, in that he blended the plea for personal commitment to God with the call for a restoration of the Church to the purity of a former Christian era. And Wesley was certainly not the last zealot to seek restoration through revival.

### **The Baptists and Disciples of Christ**

The preaching of John Wesley during the First Great Awakening, although foundational to the Methodist Church, reached Protestant Believers of all stripe. But perhaps it reached none more effec-

tively than the newly established Baptist churches in America. From a single congregation in 1608, the Baptists had expanded to forty-seven by 1644. By 1800, they had become the largest denomination in the United States. What were the reasons for the increase? There were various reasons. But one important factor was the spreading rings of influence emanating from the revivalist preaching of John Wesley and George Whitefield:

*In the latter half of the eighteenth century the impact of the Great Awakening on the Baptists was strong, and the Calvinist orientation was modified by a shift toward a pietistic and revivalistic evangelicalism, especially among the spate of new associations formed during or soon after that period. (Ibid., p. 145)*

By the early nineteenth century, Wesley’s bold declaration that the Church had not yet achieved the Protestant Reformation’s goal of restoration to the purity of the Apostolic Age was having a solid impact on the Baptists:

*At a time when the religious atmosphere of the country was being much influenced by the Second Great Awakening, many persons questing for a church life based on New Testament and early church patterns were drawn into the Baptist movement as it increasingly found its unity in the emphasis on biblical authority. (Ibid., p. 145)*

So now we find that a group of Protestant Christians other than the Methodists were influenced by Wesley’s vision of a restoration to the Protestant ideal. However, some of these folks were seeking that ideal in ways other than those envisaged by Wesley himself. One such individual was Alexander Campbell. He, like Wesley, put his beliefs into action:

*As he sought to find a basis of uniting the various branches of Christendom by the restoration of primitive apostolic patterns, he adopted baptism of believers by immersion, and in 1813 his independent Brush Run Church joined the Redstone Baptist Association of Pennsylvania, ... He urged Baptists along with all other Christians to return completely to New Testament patterns of church life with a minimum of organization. His influence spread rapidly as many Baptist congregations joined the ranks of the Reformers, but the two movements were on collision courses, and by 1830 the churches under Campbell influence had largely withdrawn to become a principal element in the indigenous American denomination called the Disciples of Christ. (Ibid., pp. 145–146)*

**“Among the varied Baptist groups, associations and denominations in existence today are many that claim to have at least partially attained the Early Church ideal over the past 150 years.”**

And so it appears yet another Protestant denomination has its roots directly in the desire for restoration of the Early Church ideal. Did they find it? The Baptists didn’t think so. And the Baptist search for that ideal did not end with the sudden withdrawal of Campbell and his followers. Among the varied Baptist groups, associations and denominations

in existence today are many that claim to have at least partially attained the Early Church ideal over the past 150 years. The Primitive Baptists, for example:

*are in search of the true church on the basis of what they find in the Bible and in the familiar traditions that they believe to be soundly, biblically based. (Ibid., p. 150)*

Some Baptists even came to claim they never lost anything. Beginning in 1851, a Baptist pastor and writer named J.R. Graves began propounding the view that the only true Christian churches were those Baptist churches in succession to the apostolic churches of the first century. His argument in that regard revolved around the Baptist claim of lineal descent from the martyrs of those primi-

tive churches as well as to the protection and preservation of the true Gospel message. This “Old Landmark” movement eventually resulted in the formation of the American Baptist Association in 1924.

The Old Baptist Union headquartered in London also claims to have somehow achieved the ideal:

*“as a people, we are united internationally, to observe and teach all of the principles of the first Christian church founded by Christ and the Apostles; but for the sake of distinction from other societies we are known as ‘The Old Baptists,’ for we are indeed true successors of the first Baptists, and hence the oldest Baptists in the world—the church against which ‘the gates of hell’ have not prevailed.” (Ibid., p. 150)*

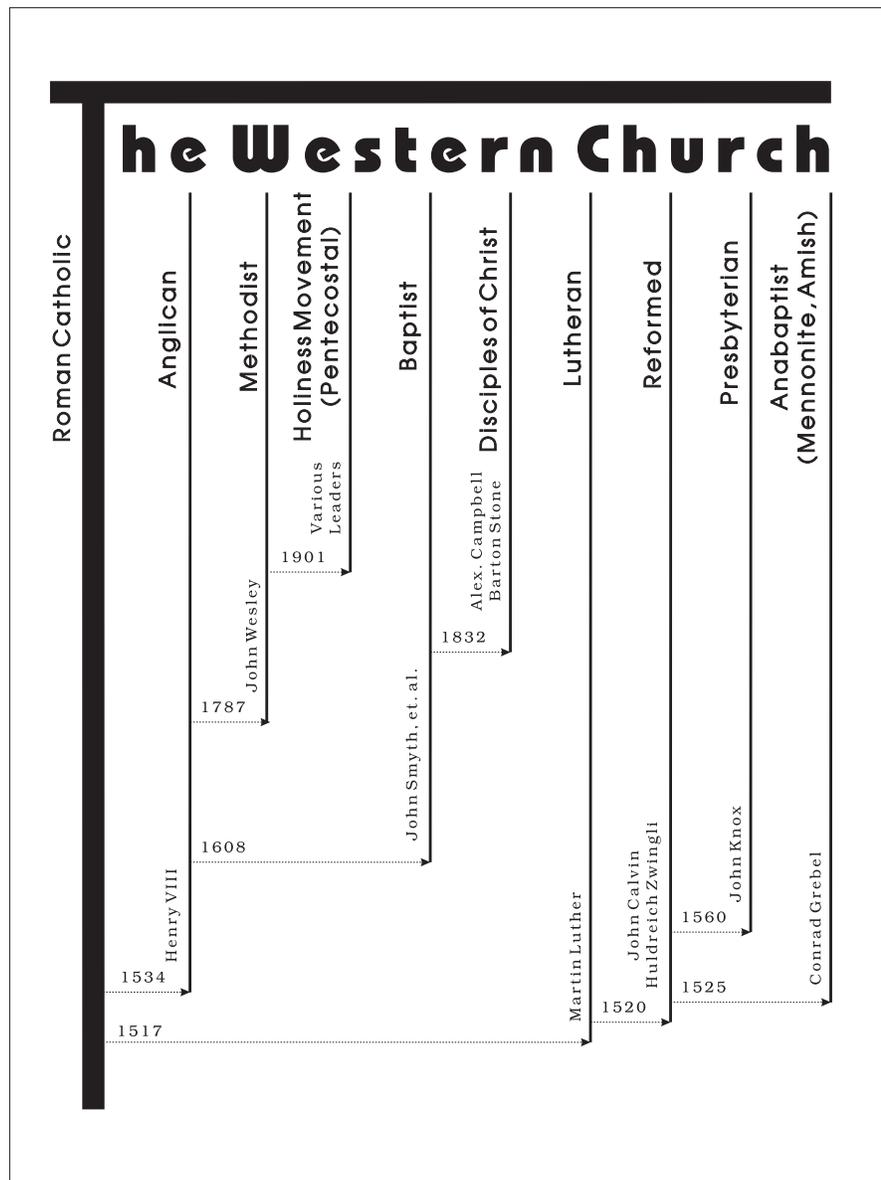
Beyond those Baptists who explicitly lay claim to have fully recovered or never lost the ideal, however, lie all the other Baptist groups, associations and denominations. Many of these have probably long since forgotten their original charter was established by someone who intended to *restore* what he believed the Church had lost.

So, you see, good Protestants that they are, the Baptists also trace their origin back to the *restoration* goals of an earlier age. They are not alone in that regard. All Protestant denominations, associations, sects and splinter groups ultimately derive from the belief that the Church somewhere, somehow, some way, lost what it had at the first. Most of them were established by people who came to believe they had recovered that certain something that was lost.

In spite of the fact that you consider yourself a Protestant, the foregoing may well be news to you. It is true nonetheless. It is also true that the search for what the Church lost did not end with the establishment of the various Baptist groups that claimed to have somehow *restored* it.

### ***The Pentecostals***

Toward the end of last century, while some Baptists were deciding they had never lost anything, other Baptists,



The distinctive feature of the Western Church is that none of its various fragments wants to recognize that all are part of one Church—God’s Church. The Catholic Church sees the Protestant Reformation as the work of Satan. (Imagine that! Luther and Calvin were Satan’s henchmen!) That same attitude is what you sometimes find exhibited by those in the “legitimate” Protestant Churches toward all the “young upstarts” like the

Methodists, Disciples of Christ and—if they will even admit they are Christian—the Pentecostals. That’s the trouble with people. When they don’t know what they don’t know, they don’t know that they don’t know. You know? The problem with the Western Church is another matter. If it weren’t filled with Pretenders, it would be a lot closer to being what God intended. □

**“Several students at a Holiness Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, determined that the gift of speaking in tongues was the visible outward sign of the inward work they called the ‘Baptism of the Holy Spirit.’”**

confident they had already recovered what was lost, were finding their calling in missionary activity around the world. During that same period, however, the still-burning desire for *restoration* was taking a slightly different turn among those Protestants who were not yet convinced any Protestant group had stumbled on to the ideal.

We saw earlier that John Wesley combined his appeal for *restoration* with the call for a distinctly personal commitment to God. He did so not just by preaching the need for the new birth but also by claiming there was a “second definite work of grace” that Christians needed—an experience known as “sanctification.” That blending of the theological and the practical, combined as it was with the impetus provided by the new converts coming out of the Second Great Awakening (1776–1846), contributed directly to the distinctly American phenomenon known as the Holiness Movement.

Meeting annually in summer camp meetings, these Holiness folk sought the *restoration* of the Church to its former glory through the sovereign inner working of God’s Holy Spirit. They believed firmly in Wesley’s second definite work of grace, an experience different from and other than the new birth, and pursued the apostolic ideal through personal holiness.

Over time, some in the Holiness Movement came to identify Wesley’s second definite work of grace as the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Believing there was such an experience, however, they still could not answer the question concerning how one could be certain they had received the “baptism.” However, that situation changed shortly after the turn of the twentieth century.

In the winter of 1901, several students at a Holiness Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, determined that the gift of speaking in tongues was the visible outward sign of the inward work they called the “Baptism of the Holy Spirit.” The rest is history. The past century has seen Pentecostal revival sweep the world. In

many areas around the world Pentecostals have been, and continue to be, the fastest growing segment of Protestantism.

Pentecostals were quick to identify their “baptism” as the ultimate *restoration* of the New Testament ideal. In their view, the fires of Pentecostal revival confirmed that. Their “gifts of the Spirit” were the “Latter Rain” that would mark the end of the Church Age just as the Early Church’s experience of speaking in tongues on the Day of Pentecost was the “Early Rain” that marked the beginning of that Age.

Hence, the Pentecostals, like the Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists and all other denominations before them, came to believe they had *restored* the final thing the Church had somehow lost. For them, the last thing that needed to be *restored* was the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. How could they be certain that was all that remained to be *restored*? I don’t know. Maybe you should ask them. While you’re at it, you should also ask the Lutherans, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, etc. the same question. They all came to the same conclusion regarding the different things they believe their founders *restored* at different times over the past five centuries.

### **The Fundamentalists**

In order to understand the beliefs and activities of most conservative Protestants today, you must first understand how the fundamentalist controversy that occurred at the beginning of this century has served to shape their theology and world view. That information is important to an accurate understanding of why they are now becoming involved in social and political issues rather than seeking God through revival as they did in the past.

You see, the Fundamentalists are still carrying on the Protestant *restoration* effort, but they have put a slightly different twist on that endeavor. Since their viewpoint is pervasive in the con-

servative Protestant Church today, let’s take a look.

As we have just seen, the Holiness Movement continued the search for what some Protestants sincerely believed the Church had lost and other Protestants had not yet *restored*. Some of these folks ended up as Pentecostals when they came to believe their search for the Primitive Church was over.

Others in the Holiness Movement, however, when faced with the issue of speaking in tongues as the sign of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, suddenly decided they should look elsewhere to find what they were seeking. Consequently, right after the turn of the century, these Holiness Believers began to join with conservative Believers from the mainline Protestant denominations in what has since become known as the “Fundamentalist Movement.”

The Fundamentalist Movement was started by conservative Protestants—primarily those in the Baptist and Presbyterian denominations—who became convinced the Protestant Church faced the distinct possibility of losing valid theological doctrines that had been *restored* during the Protestant Reformation. Therefore, as George Marsden has shown in his book *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, conservative Protestants in various denominations began drawing closer together in their common battle against encroaching modern liberalism. These conservatives became known as “Fundamentalists” because

**“The Fundamentalists are still carrying on the Protestant restoration effort, but they have put a slightly different twist on that endeavor.”**

***“By the time the fundamentalist controversy arose, the mainline Protestant denominations—Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, etc.—had long since decided they had restored what they believed the Catholic Church had lost.”***

they believed certain basic Protestant doctrines were “fundamental” Christian doctrines. [Editor: Marsden’s book is listed on the Order Form at the back of this issue.]

Most Fundamentalists were vehemently against the Pentecostal phenomena. Some of the Fundamentalists who came out of the Holiness Movement still are, owing in part to disputes that arose when the Pentecostals began breaking off from Holiness associations around 1910. These Fundamentalists refuse to recognize Pentecostals as much more than distant cousins, if that. Nonetheless, facts are facts. The Pentecostals at the turn of the century agreed with their fundamentalist brethren on basic Protestant doctrines. By and large they still do. The major point of contention has always been the tongues experience/doctrine the Pentecostals claim to have *restored*.

Most early Pentecostal leaders were nothing more than conservative Protestant preachers until the speaking-in-tongues-as-a-sign issue arose. At that time, they accepted the new doctrine in which tongues were the “outward sign” of an inward work—the Baptism of the Holy Spirit—and broke away from established Holiness organizations, often taking entire churches with them. Needless to say, that didn’t sit well with the leaders of the organizations that lost churches to the Pentecostals. Of such things is lingering animosity made.

After forming their own organizations, the Pentecostals became preoccupied with the spiritual phenomena they saw happening in their churches. Their Holiness brethren, on the other hand, found something else demanded their attention—the fundamentalist controversy. Unfortunately, they carried their search for the Protestant ideal into their new endeavor.

The battles Fundamentalists fought against liberal teaching shortly after the turn of last century have had a profound impact on all Protestants, Liberals and

Conservatives alike. Those battles began the shaping of the conservative Protestant mind-set into what it is today. Fundamentalists from the Holiness Movement made an important contribution to that movement. Therefore, it is important that True Believers understand what happened at that time. I encourage you to read Marsden’s book as a good beginning. What I present now is my own analysis from the perspective of how those battles have served to alter the focus of the Protestant *restoration* effort.

### ***Conservatives Today***

By the end of last century, a broad spectrum of Protestant Believers found the most cogently stated Protestant theologies to be those based on John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Most notable among these were the theologies of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) and Charles Hodge (1797–1878). Calvin, like all the Protestant Reformers, had appealed to the higher authority of Scripture (revelation) as the basis for his rejection of the authority of apostolic succession (the Pope) to which the Catholic Church laid claim.

When Charles Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859, however, he unleashed an avalanche of publications written by liberal theologians that challenged this foundational tenet of the Protestant religion—the authority of Scripture. Therefore, the theory of evo-

lution was no minor thing to those Protestant Believers who based their hopes on this “fundamental” Protestant doctrine. Their Protestant forebearers had firmly believed that tenet of the Faith, and they were not about to give it up easily. If the Bible could be shown to be faulty, how could it be the revelation on which their beliefs were based?

By the time the fundamentalist controversy arose, the mainline Protestant denominations—Presbyterians, Baptists, Methodists, etc.—had long since decided they had *restored* what they believed the Catholic Church had lost. So conservatives in those denominations were able to make common cause with one another on the “fundamental” issue of the authority of Scripture. Therefore, these conservatives immediately jumped into the fray, determined to defend what they believed had already been *restored*.

The only Protestants still out there seeking to find something more at the turn of the century were those in the Holiness Movement. Their search ended abruptly when the Pentecostal wing of the Holiness Movement came to the conclusion they had *restored* the doctrine related to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

The Pentecostals immediately stopped seeking to *restore* anything more. They turned instead to proclaiming they had finally found the Holy Grail. Those in the Holiness Movement who weren’t convinced by the Pentecostals’ new-found “sign” pulled back into defensive positions and joined the Fundamentalist Movement in its fight to defend the authority of Scripture.

As a result of the simultaneous occurrence of the fundamentalist controversy and the Pentecostal revivals, the vibrant ongoing Protestant search for what the Church had lost came to an abrupt end. Oh, sure, you still can find pockets of individuals who have taken up the search for the Christian ideal. They have done so because they have heard talk about the possibility of find-

***“For the most part, the once widespread Protestant belief that something more needed to be restored has long since faded.”***

***“The restoration zeal of the Fundamentalists found a distinct form of expression in the 1950s and 1960s when the Evangelical wing of Protestant Fundamentalism began pushing for a ‘revival of evangelical Christianity.’”***

ing something more. But, for the most part, the once widespread Protestant belief that something more needed to be *restored* has long since faded.

Over the past eighty years, conservative Protestant churches have changed dramatically. Instead of the desire for a sovereign move of the Holy Spirit like that experienced in the fires of earlier Protestant revivals, there is now only the talk of “church renewal.” These people are seeking to *restore* what the Church had in an earlier time, but that earlier time is no longer the time of the Apostles. It is instead a time in the not so distant past, when Protestant Christians supposedly had more spiritual vitality. What’s going on there?

Over the past eighty years, conservative Christians have likewise changed. Instead of focusing on *restoring* to the Church things that were lost, they now want to *restore* to the United States of America the Christian spirituality it supposedly has lost. The spiritual descendants of the Fundamentalist Movement now want to “bring America back to God,” as though the average American were ever there to begin with. What’s going on there?

The answers to both questions lie in the fact that the Protestant *restoration* effort lost its focus during the early part of this century. When one group of Protestants gave up the *restoration* effort, it was because they decided they had finally *restored* the ultimate. That’s what happened with the Lutherans, the Mennonites, the Presbyterians, the Baptists, the Methodists and, finally, the Pentecostals. They all thought they had *restored* everything there was to *restore*.

But always in the past, when one group decided they had *restored* the ideal, another group remained unconvinced. Not believing that all had been *restored*, these seekers provided continued impetus for the ongoing *restoration* effort. There are some like that today among the Pentecostals. But due to the

pietist/mystical legacy the Pentecostals inherited from their Holiness founders, they have no clear idea where to look for that something more. Most are looking for it in some *subjective* experience instead of in the *objective* revelation of the Scriptures as the Reformers before them did.

There were some in the Holiness Movement who were not convinced the *restoration* effort had achieved what God intended when the Pentecostal revivals broke out. What happened to them? They ended up in the Fundamentalist Movement. What happened to their *restoration* zeal? During World War I, it was redirected and refocused as a pious patriotism.

The restoration zeal of these Fundamentalists found a distinct form of expression in the 1950s and 1960s when the Evangelical wing of Protestant Fundamentalism began pushing for a “revival of evangelical Christianity.” Notice they were no longer seeking to *restore* what the Roman Catholic Church had lost. They were now seeking to *restore* what the Protestant Church had lost.

By the late 1980s, the *restoration* zeal of the Fundamentalists had found expression in the patriotic call to “bring America back to God.” The ultimate fundamentalist solution to the problems presented by the theory of evolution is incredibly simple, and also incredibly naïve: Let’s use politics to take America

***“By the late 1980s, the restoration zeal of the Fundamentalists had found expression in the patriotic call to ‘bring America back to God.’”***

back a century or so, to a much different time when everybody accepted the authority of Scripture, when everybody believed there was a God.

Obviously, the *restoration* of America to God isn’t going to happen any time soon. Probably never will. Yet the avid heirs of Fundamentalism carry on with the zeal typical of all Protestant Reformers before them, unaware that their predecessors’ zeal for the *restoration* of the Protestant ideal lost its focus some 80 years ago. They should be spending their time trying to *restore* what the Church lost in an earlier age. Instead, they are trying to *restore* something America never had. Such are the devious tactics Satan uses to deceive.

### **Conclusion**

If you did not find your own Protestant denomination or association mentioned in this article, it was not omitted intentionally. I could have included many more Christian organizations than I have. But I only included those necessary to illustrate my point: All Protestants stem from the original belief that the Church lost something important.

For example, the founder of the Amish system of beliefs was a Mennonite bishop named Jacob Amman. His group split off from the Mennonites in the late seventeenth century, thinking they had *restored* some greater truth of Scripture on the basis of literal interpretation of the Scriptures. By contrast, the Nazarene churches are of more recent origin (1908), having a Methodist/Holiness line of descent until they formed their own separate organization. Unfortunately, some (not all) of the splinter groups and sects that have come into existence over the past century are more the result of bad habits learned than of a sincere desire to find *The Way* back to God’s pure Church.

So, what do you think? Did the Roman Catholic Church actually lose some

***“Nobody since the time of Tertullian and Hippolytus has been able to find  
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crucial doctrine or practice? We Protestants say it did. If you think not, you must be either Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox. You certainly can't be a Protestant, for that is the very *raison d'être* of the Protestant Churches. Now that I think about it, I suppose you could be a Protestant, it just wouldn't be logical, that's all. But I guess there isn't any rule that says everybody has to be logical.

Let's say for the moment that you are Protestant and you do believe the Church lost something. Now take a look around you. Do you see any evidence that convinces you any one group among all the myriad manifestations and aberrations of the Protestant Church has managed to *restore* what the Roman Catholic Church lost? If you answered "Yes!" to that question, that is exactly where you should park your carcass and wait for the Lord's Return. You can, with clear conscience, stop reading right now, turn out the lights and go to sleep.

Now that we've dropped the naysayers, I venture to suggest—with the current state of the Protestant Church providing mute testimony—that none among us are yet the special people God would have His Church be. I say that in spite of the fact that some of our more boisterous fellow-Protestants seem to think the post-rapture party has already begun (as if they were going to be there).

For you good Protestants reading this who, like me, can't honestly say you see any around us who have yet attained

***“Most Protestants are quite content to assume their denomination, group, or association has already restored all that needs to be restored.”***

the Early Church ideal, I encourage you to consider your options. If the Church did indeed lose something—as Protestants have continued to insist for well over four hundred years—we must be in quite a pickle.

Now I'm not all that naïve. I know most Protestants are quite content to assume their denomination, group, or association has already *restored* all that needs to be *restored*. Actually, most of them have no idea what it *means* to be a Christian, much less that someone before them ever claimed to have recaptured the Protestant equivalent of the Holy Grail. They were just born Protestant—Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, etc.—and never got around to looking into their roots.

But you? Surely you have more on the ball than those folks! So, what do you think? Have you arrived, or are you still searching? If you're still searching, you may be interested in what I have to say. So let me tell you what I'm all about.

First, there is the matter of what was lost. Just as the Protestant Reformers deduced was true, the Church did lose something, a certain something special called "*The Apostolic Teaching*." The Church lost that right around A.D. 200, at about the same time that two Christian leaders who knew and believed *The Apostolic Teaching*—Tertullian and Hippolytus—left the orthodox Church.

More than any other Protestant Reformer, John Wesley came closest to the Truth as to when the Church lost what it once had. He was also probably close in his assessment of the Montanist Christians. I haven't yet looked into the matter, but they may well have been forced out of the orthodox Church because their views became unacceptable after the second-century Church took a slight turn to the right. Tertullian—one of the great theologians of the late second century—seemed to think they were preferable to the orthodox Church of his day. He quit the Church in A.D. 207 and became a Montanist, in part because he dis-

agreed with the readmission of Pretenders who had denied Christ during persecution. (See "Puritans and Pretenders: Cyprian, Novatian, and the Lapsed" in this issue.)

Second, there is the matter regarding the appropriate method one should use in recovering what the Church lost. Once *The Apostolic Teaching* was lost, speculation concerning the *meaning* of Scripture became the norm. But speculation could never replace the revelation of *The Apostolic Teaching* Jesus Christ had

***“Just as the Protestant Reformers deduced was true, the Church did lose something, a certain something special called ‘The Apostolic Teaching.’”***

given the Apostles. That could only be regained if He gave *The Teaching* again by revelation. Consequently, nobody since the time of Tertullian and Hippolytus has been able to find *The Way* back to the purity of the Truth of the Old Testament Gospel message concerning Jesus Christ that was known to the early Christians.

Did you notice I said "Old Testament Gospel message"? That brings up the issue of where the Protestants have been looking in their attempts to *restore* what was lost. All the Protestant Reformers, with the possible exception of the Massachusetts Bay Puritans—and they were interested in the Old Testament mainly for its applicability to human government—searched for what had been lost in the New Testament and the Early Church Fathers. The fact is, *The Apostolic Teaching* can only be

***“If you are a Protestant Christian, you must believe the Church originally had something special to offer. Therefore, logic demands that you believe the Church either lost that certain something or it didn’t.”***

found in an accurate understanding of the Old Testament message.

Third, there is the matter of identifying what has been lost. You see, *The Apostolic Teaching* has a specific label in Scripture and in the Jewish and Christian extra-biblical literature. It’s called *The Way*. Do you know why? Because it is *The Way* one must “walk” if they want to return to God. You know what else? I’ve been called to *make The Way of the Lord straight* so you can follow it easily. That’s a ridiculous notion, isn’t it? But if it’s true, isn’t it interesting that everything written in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings fits together perfectly with what the New Testament and Early Church writings have to say about *The Way*? I’ll show you how that is over the next several years, provided you are willing to listen.

Fourth, there is the matter of timing. Our Protestant forebearers knew the Catholic Church had lost something. Some (but not all) of them even had a fairly good idea as to what that *something* was. The problem they faced was the fact that “there is a time for every event under heaven” (Ecc. 3:1). The time for what they were trying to do had not yet come. That time is now. That’s another ridiculous notion, isn’t it? But hold on to that thought for just a bit, the ridiculous gets even better. (Some would say “even deeper.” And they’re already breaking out the shovels.)

You see, God called me to do what all those good Protestant Reformers before me knew needed to be done but couldn’t do because it wasn’t the right time. Why wasn’t it the right time? Because everything remained in the hands of God. Remember I told you *The Apostolic Teaching* could only be regained if Jesus Christ gave it to someone again by revelation? Well, now that the time of the End has come, revelation is no longer necessary. If you want to know why, I invite you to read “Did Jesus Leave a Will?” *The Voice of Elijah*, July 1991.

Now that the Good Lord has done what needs to be done so that revelation is no longer necessary for us to regain what was lost, He has called me to *restore The Apostolic Teaching*. Do you know why? Because the Return of Jesus Christ is just around the corner. That’s another ridiculous notion, isn’t it? (Better shovel faster, boys. It’s getting pretty deep.)

I’ve been called to show you *The Way* back so that you can be ready when Jesus Christ returns. Does that sound strange to you? If it does, just remember this: There are lots of Christian ministers

***“The Apostolic Teaching can only be found in an accurate understanding of the Old Testament message.”***

out there preaching to you. If God didn’t call them to do exactly what they’re doing, why are they doing it? I’m not claiming anything more than what they claim: God called me to do what I’m doing. I assume they believe He did the same for them. If they don’t or He didn’t, I would not want to be in their shoes on Judgment Day!

Think about it. If you are an *orthodox* Protestant, you must agree with some Protestant Reformer or the other who said the Church lost something along the way. That’s why the particular Reformer you prefer set out to *restore* what was lost. That Reformer rejected the contention that everything had already been *restored*. I do the same. All those before me didn’t, just as I don’t, see anything in the Church that even vaguely resembles Apostolic Christianity.

So, you see. I’m not so radical after all, am I? I’m just doing what lots of other Protestants before me have done.

I’m also doing what all those Christian leaders today claim to be doing—I’m doing what God called me to do. And the proof of my calling will be, as they say, “in the pudding.” So if it doesn’t taste right to you, nobody says you have to eat it. But you really should consider the following logic:

1. If you are a Protestant Christian, you must believe the Church originally had something special to offer. Therefore, logic demands that you believe the Church either lost that certain something or it didn’t.
2. If you are a Protestant Christian and you don’t believe the Church lost anything, logic demands that you should be either Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox.
3. If you are an *orthodox* Protestant Christian, you must believe the Catholic Church lost something that it should have maintained. Therefore, logic demands that you also believe some Protestant group has either fully *restored* what was lost or no Protestant group has fully *restored* it.
4. If you believe some Protestant group has fully *restored* that something special that was lost, logic demands that you should join them. If you already have, you should stay right where you are.
5. If you don’t believe any Protestant group has found that something special that was lost, it’s up to you as to whether you continue looking or give up all hope of the Church ever finding what was lost.

That wasn’t difficult, was it? Looking at it logically, it’s a simple decision. I only wish getting up in the morning were so easy. ■

# Q & A nswers

**The Voice of Elijah** publishes articles based on the findings of *The Elijah Project*, a private research group headed by Larry D. Harper. In this column we seek answers to general-interest questions concerning the findings, purpose and philosophy of this project.

**Editor:** *In this column a year ago I asked you to survey the previous year and comment on what you saw as the most significant event for you personally. Would you mind doing the same this year?*

**Elijah:** Not at all. The seminar I presented in October would have to be the defining event of the year, not so much because of the seminar itself but because of the nine months I spent trying to organize my thoughts and put them into some coherent form. Listening to the rough edits of those tapes was also a pivotal event for me.

**Editor:** *How's that?*

**Elijah:** Hearing myself on tape—both before and after you edited out all my fits and starts—forced me to accept the fact that I'm just not cut out for that type of thing. In the past, I enjoyed public speaking because it gave me an opportunity to do what I liked—I could be a comedian. When I preached back then, people always commented on how much they got out of my sermons. Actually, they were probably responding to the humor. I doubt many of them even got the drift of what I had said. But if they didn't, it wasn't entirely their fault. I have always been more interested in comedy than communication. Now that I understand what I've been called to do, however, I can see that my comic tendency is a serious character flaw. I'm not here to entertain anyone. I'm here to communicate to others what I see and understand in the Scriptures. If I fail at that, I alone will suffer. But I'm not going to fail.



**Editor:** *So what's your point?*

**Elijah:** Just that I don't intend to accomplish my ministry through public speaking of any kind.

**Editor:** *From that I assume you've decided you aren't going to offer any more seminars.*

**Elijah:** That's right.

**Editor:** *If that's the case, how do you plan to teach?*

**Elijah:** There are all sorts of ways to communicate that don't involve a live forum. I've known for some time that the VCR was foundational to what I have to do. So I'll use audio and video tape. I've already discovered in producing *The Next Step* tapes that I can keep my train of thought better in a studio anyway. I'm sure I can do the same thing on a sound stage. And I won't have to prepare six hours of material like I did in October. Getting ready to present that much information at one time took a lot of extra time and effort. But, to be honest, those aren't the only reasons I've decided against seminars. I discovered a long time ago that I have an intense dislike for teaching. I've always enjoyed preaching, but hated teaching. That's probably because I'm not good at giving spontaneous responses. People don't ask you to answer questions when you're preaching. Ironic, isn't it? God calls me to do the one thing I would rather not do.

**Editor:** *There has to be more to it than just answering questions. What else do you find so ... "repugnant" ... about teaching?*

**Elijah:** I suppose it all goes back to my first experience as a teacher. I was a Teaching Fellow my last year in seminary, and I absolutely hated it. I have never experienced such intense stress as I did then. As I remember the sordid details, I taught a three-hour class in Hebrew—one hour a day, three days a week, from January to June. That was in 1975. I also carried a full load of classes, trying to finish my Master's of Divinity at the same time. And I was forced to deal with circumstances at home that were, to say the least, less than conducive to academic excellence of any kind.

That was my first go at teaching, and I failed miserably. By the end of the second term, the results were

obvious to everybody. There were three or four of us, each one teaching a different section of the same Biblical Hebrew class. All of the sections took the same tests, and all were graded on one curve. Needless to say, most of my class had failing grades. Those that didn't were the exception, and they certainly didn't have me to thank for their grade. The only reason I continued teaching in an academic setting after that was because I knew God had called me to teach.

**Editor:** *You say you continued to teach in academic settings. Were all your classes as bad as that first experience?*

**Elijah:** From my perspective? Yes. But since I controlled the grading after that first fiasco, I compensated for my lack of skill by giving everybody an "A." I couldn't honestly do anything else. The absolute dread I felt every time I entered the classroom never changed. I'm sure I would feel the same way today if I were to teach in a college setting. I have never felt comfortable in those circumstances, and I don't suppose I ever will.

**Editor:** *Why is that?*

**Elijah:** Academia is a mixture of hard facts and hot air. In my opinion, it takes someone with the verbal skills of a politician and the enthusiasm of a salesman to pull it off, especially at the graduate and post-graduate level. I was never all that concerned about leaving people with the impression I was some academic heavyweight. As long as I had mastered the subject at hand, that's all I cared about. Unfortunately, that's not all that's required. Appearing to be more knowledgeable than you are counts for much more than it should in an academic setting, and watching how you say things is crucial.

When I taught, I had a tendency to pull examples out of the air trying to illustrate a point somebody found difficult to understand. Those examples sometimes contained statements that begged for more precise definition. That would then start a discussion I had no interest in pursuing because it was irrelevant to the topic of the course. Moreover, some of the examples I used didn't always have the relevance they should have, and that would introduce some other point of discussion. For example, I remember trying to explain the difference between verbal tense and verbal aspect in a Biblical Hebrew class at Cal Berkeley. I made the mistake of using the wrong example and promptly lost the entire class because my example prompted an irrelevant discussion. I never got my point across.

**Editor:** *Not that it's important, but what's the difference between verbal aspect and verbal tense?*

**Elijah:** Verbal tense relates to the *time* of verbal action—whether the activity is present, past, or future. Verbal aspect relates to the *kind* of verbal action—whether it is completed or continuing. Some languages have tense, some have aspect. Some have a combination of both. English has verbal tense. Biblical Hebrew and Classical Greek both have verbal aspect. Probably the most well-known thing related to Hebrew verbal aspect is the "Prophetic Perfect." The Prophets, in speaking concerning the future activity of God, used the perfect aspect to indicate the divine action was already completed. It's just one of those little things that says a lot when you stop to think about it. The Prophets knew there wasn't any doubt about the fulfillment of God's Word.

*Talking about languages ...* I was reading in the Sumerian mythology related to the ancient Sacred Marriage ceremony a month or so ago and came across a couple of the idioms I have already explained for your readers. I can't remember which ones they were. One of them was "raise up a name" as I recall. The other may have been "build a house." I've already told your readers in the newsletter and *The Update* that those Hebrew idioms are combined in the Scriptures with *parabolic images* the Prophets took from the ancient Sacred Marriage ceremony.

The *significance* of the occurrence of those idioms in the Sumerian literature should not be overlooked. The same idioms occur in the ancient Canaanite and Akkadian languages. It is not always obvious that they are related to the ancient Sacred Marriage ceremony in those languages, so their occurrence can't be shown to be *significant*. But Sumerian is not a semitic language. It is an agglutinative language like that spoken by the Turkic peoples. The fact that the idioms occur in Sumerian, and the fact that they are related to the ancient Sacred Marriage ceremony in that language can be shown to be *significant*. Let me quickly explain how that is, then we can go on to something else.

It is well known that the Akkadian-speaking people of the Mesopotamian valley borrowed extensively from the Sumerians. They borrowed from their language, their culture, and their religion. They almost certainly took up the Sacred Marriage ceremony from them because they appear to have adopted their entire mythology. So the Akkadians must have borrowed the Sumerian idioms that spoke concerning that religious ceremony as well. They carried the idioms over into their own semitic language where the idioms went on to become widespread throughout the ancient Near East as semitic idioms. The fact that those originally Sumerian idioms later appear in the Hebrew Scriptures, where they are still related to *parabolic images*

the Prophets had taken from the Sacred Marriage ceremony, is certainly not without *significance*. It points out that the Prophets had distinct ancient Near Eastern mythological images in mind when they wrote what they wrote. It's just another one of those little things about language that says a lot.

**Editor:** *Your point about the significance of that rather minor fact brings to mind a conversation we had a few weeks back in which you explained to me the relationship of Moses and Aaron. I found it interesting that their relationship could be so clearly explained in Scripture yet so deftly concealed. Since that has kept you from finishing The Mystery of Scripture, would you mind explaining it for our readers?*

**Elijah:** That one caught me completely off guard. I thought I had finished most of that book by the first of November. But while I was getting ready to send the rough draft out to The Next Step contributors for their input, I began to have some nagging doubts about the last chapter, so I rewrote it. After I had rewritten the chapter, I felt even worse about it than before. I simply couldn't figure out how the ministry of Moses the Prophet related to the ministry of Aaron the Priest. So I didn't send that chapter out with the rest of the manuscript.

I knew Aaron the Priest had to be the one teaching the people because that was the only thing that made sense in light of what God had done with the priesthood. It was also the only thing that fit together with the fact that God had refused to let the seventy elder/prophets teach the sons of Israel concerning *The Teaching of Moses*. But I couldn't see how to put everything together in an explanation that made perfect sense. I knew I lacked some crucial bit of evidence, but I couldn't figure out what it was.

**Editor:** *And the evidence was ...?*

**Elijah:** The relationship that Moses had with his brother Aaron. The Scriptures tell you three or four times that, except for one time, Moses never spoke directly to Pharaoh or to the sons of Israel; he always spoke to Aaron, and Aaron spoke as his Prophet. [Editor: Ex. 4:12-16; 6:10-13; 6:28-7:2.] I knew that's what the text said, but I had never paid any attention to the implications of what that *meant* when it was put into practice.

**Editor:** *What are the implications?*

**Elijah:** If Aaron spoke for Moses whenever Moses had anything to say, it's obvious the author of the text

meant to at least downplay, if not outright conceal, Aaron's role. He did a good job of it, too. For example, when the two men went up to talk to Pharaoh, the author of the biblical text almost always tells us either "Moses said" or "Moses said to Pharaoh." The only exception is Exodus 10:3, where he says, "Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him." It's obvious he expects you to understand Aaron was speaking for Moses, but he doesn't state that plainly. Why? Because he's already told you that's what their relationship was going to be, and he expects you to read the Truth in what he says later. If Moses wrote the Pentateuch, and I'm certain that he did (in spite of all this higher criticism hocus-pocus), you can begin to get a feel for his attitude toward his brother Aaron.

Aaron was Moses' older brother, three years older, not that it mattered much as old as they were. The text says Moses was eighty and Aaron was eighty-three when they went to see Pharaoh. They were forty years older than that when they died. But Aaron was always getting into something that wasn't quite square as far as God was concerned. I think Moses got downright frustrated in the relationship he had with Aaron before their forty years in the wilderness were over. I mention different things in *The Mystery of Scripture* that I believe tend to indicate Moses came to regret that he had ever raised the issue of his lack of eloquence. He would have had cause to regret it because that's why God appointed Aaron as his Prophet. I also believe, although I have nothing to back it up right now, that Aaron was somehow responsible for the episode at the rock where God told both of them they couldn't enter the Promised Land.

**Editor:** *You just mentioned Moses and Aaron not being allowed to enter the Promised Land because they struck the rock instead of speaking to it. I found that fascinating. Would you talk about that for our readers?*

**Elijah:** That event took place near the end of the wilderness wandering, right before Aaron died, and I'm not sure which one of them hit the rock instead of speaking to it. The reason I'm not sure is because the text indicates in other places that Aaron used the staff as Moses' agent. He spoke for Moses all the time, and he wielded the staff for him on different occasions. I'm not sure but what the author wants us to understand Aaron always wielded the staff. If so, Aaron would have struck the rock as Moses' agent on that occasion also, although the text seems to indicate Moses did it himself. If Aaron struck the rock instead of speaking to it, I'm sure Moses must have regretted ever having gotten himself into the relationship he had with Aaron.

I haven't yet looked into the matter of which one struck the rock. I have looked at the Hebrew text of Numbers 20, and the text is extremely clear about them speaking to the rock. God told Moses that both he and Aaron were supposed to speak. That *meant* Moses was supposed to speak to Aaron, and Aaron was supposed to speak to the rock, just as the two of them had done with the Pharaoh and had been doing all along with the sons of Israel.

A literal reading of the text seems to indicate Moses struck the rock himself. So I tend to think that is what we should understand. There could be any number of reasons why he did that. He could have been expressing frustration over having been told to use Aaron as his Prophet just to speak to a rock. At this point, I don't know. I do know the unique relationship the two of them had. I do know the writer of the Pentateuch did his best to veil that relationship from our sight. And I do know their relationship has profound *significance* as far as our understanding of the Old Testament message is concerned. Beyond that, I don't know much at all right now.

**Editor:** *So how much extra time did it take you to put all this together and get it down in writing? Bottom line: When can we expect to see The Mystery of Scripture?*

**Elijah:** I lost about three weeks by the time I had rewritten the last chapter twice and sorted out Moses' relationship with Aaron. Bottom line? I have to finish this first volume by the end of January. I have to. I have too many other things to do. I can't afford to let the agony continue. So, ready or not, it's out the door. If you want to know when I'll complete the entire set, I refuse to answer. We started out three years ago thinking you were going to write *The Mystery of Scripture* and it would be eighty pages or so, covering just the Intertestamental Period. I took it over (who knows how long ago?), and now this first volume is over 250 pages. I expect the complete set to be four volumes, totalling more than 1,000 pages by the time I'm through. Maybe I'll get back to writing the second volume of The Resurrection Theology Series by the end of this century. Maybe. But I refuse to set any more deadlines. When this one's finished, you'll see them when you see them.

**Editor:** *That's fair enough. Now I want to talk about the Middle East. In the last issue, you talked about the threat of Islamic Fundamentalism in that region. I read recently that a professor at a university in Egypt has been taken to court by Islamic Fundamentalists who claim he is a heretic. They say Islamic law*

*demands he be separated from his wife because a muslim cannot be married to an infidel. Should incidents like these be of concern to us here in the United States?*

**Elijah:** I hadn't heard about that incident. I know the situation in Egypt is tense. I also know the government holds elections but is not actually freely elected. So it doesn't truly represent the will of the people. If it did, Egypt might already be an Islamic state. Should that concern us here in America? In my opinion, no. But that's just my opinion. Opinions are, as they say, "a dime a dozen." Everybody has one. But since you asked, I'll answer. In my opinion the only thing anyone anywhere should be concerned about is whether or not they understand the one true message of the Scriptures.

**Editor:** *You've probably just answered my next question, but I'll ask it anyway. You said in the last issue that discussion of current events isn't really important if an "individual doesn't take the steps necessary to avoid Satan's delusion." Would you talk a little more about that? What is Satan's delusion? What should the individual who wants to avoid that delusion know?*

**Elijah:** I was talking about what Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Satan's delusion is anything other than the Truth. So take a look around you. Everybody is absolutely certain that what they believe is true. If they weren't, they wouldn't believe it. But try telling them there is one absolute Truth concerning God and see if they don't laugh in your face for being so naïve. The attitude that most people have toward the possibility of knowing the Truth is part of Satan's delusion. The only person who can avoid Satan's delusion is the one who believes there must be one Truth and, because of that belief, is still seeking to know that Truth—no matter what the cost.

Obviously, I believe I understand the Truth. In that, I'm no different than everybody else. And contrary to what they claim, those supposedly "sophisticated" people who ridicule others for being so naïve as to believe there is any absolute Truth concerning Scripture are every bit as certain that what they believe about the Bible is true. If they weren't, they wouldn't believe it. But their skepticism is just another part of Satan's delusion. They are nothing more than Satan's pawns. He is using them to create doubt and hesitation in whatever way they can. For example, some folks will admit that the Truth concerning the Scriptures must be absolute. But then they choose to believe some lie is absolutely true. Satan has snagged those people directly through their belief in a lie.

Other, more “sophisticated,” people insist there is no absolute Truth. All Truth must be relative. If that be true, it doesn’t matter what you believe. Those who believe that idiocy are the most naïve. The problem with the belief that there is no absolute Truth is the fact that the statement contradicts itself. If all Truth is relative, the claim that there is no absolute Truth cannot be absolutely true. Nevertheless, that’s exactly the sort of goofiness Satan, the father of lies, would have us all believe. We would then be convinced we could never know the Truth about anything. People who cheerfully live in that dichotomy are the people Paul mentions who “did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10).

“Smorgasbord Christians” are caught up in that delusion. They are more than willing to believe the tripe Satan peddles. They take a doctrine from here and a doctrine from there because they think that biblical Truth is somehow relative. Therefore, it doesn’t matter what you believe. Don’t kid yourself. Those people have no “love of the truth.” Their only interest is in what sounds good or what makes them feel good. They are nothing but fodder for Satan’s cannon. I couldn’t care less whether they believe anything I teach.

**Editor:** *On the subject of beliefs not being important ..., I heard a well-known Christian leader on TV the other night, talking about what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3. In referring to verse 8, he said something like, “It’s not important that you understand what Jesus was saying. We’re saved by faith.” Would you mind commenting on that?*

**Elijah:** James warned us not to seek to become Teachers because Teachers are going to be judged more harshly. [Editor: James 3:1.] Not many have heeded that warning. The statement you mentioned is a half-truth, and a half-truth is a whole lie. The first part is an outright lie. It is extremely important that we understand what Jesus *meant* by what He said. If He did not *mean* anything, He wouldn’t have said anything.

The second part of the statement you mention is a distortion of the Truth. It is true that we are saved by faith, but not faith in the sense that the person who made that statement *meant*. If I could, I would refer you to the article I had planned to write about Søren Kierkegaard for this issue. Maybe I’ll write it for the next issue. That article will deal with the ridiculous notion that faith—belief—is somehow based on the *subjective* experience of the new birth rather than in the persuasive logic of the Gospel message. That *subjective* experience as faith nonsense is what the statement you mentioned infers. Don’t latch on to Satan’s lie.

Faith is nothing more than belief. No belief should be based on a *subjective* hunch or notion, whether attributed to the new birth or otherwise. If your beliefs are not solidly based on knowledge you gained through a rational process, they are nothing more than whims and are therefore prone to change daily. Unfortunately, most “Christians” today don’t know that. And Satan loves to play with them because they believe the Truth of God’s Word “may be this, may be that.”

The Christian Faith began as a coherent body of knowledge based on the *objective* evidence one can find in the Old Testament Gospel of Jesus Christ. And in the wisdom of God it is going to end up the same way for True Believers. Christianity started out as a Body of Believers willing to give up everything because of their belief in that coherent body of knowledge. And in the wisdom of God it is going to end up the same way for True Believers. Those who believe all the garbage tossed around today about knowledge not being important are ignorant. Consequently, they are going to realize too late they have been Satan’s dupes. And those who teach such stupidity to others are going to find themselves bearing the greater shame.

**Editor:** *Your saying that reminds me of the things you said in the last issue of The Voice of Elijah Update. You really tore into the fellow who wrote the piece of Early Christian literature you were commenting on. I think you do that just to be obnoxious, but there must be other reasons. Would you explain why do you do things like that?*

**Elijah:** I’m just rattling cages. In that article, I was making fun of people who are quick to “show what they know.” I did that by ridiculing one of their own for what he had done to the Truth of *The Apostolic Teaching*. I was just trying to push some of your readers to the point where they got “fed up” with my dogmatism and lost interest in what I have to say.

People who don’t know but think they do are usually the first to react negatively to something stated dogmatically. Most of them are, like the fellow who wrote what I ridiculed—also eager to “show what they know,” but they aren’t willing to study long enough to master any subject thoroughly. Those who have a fairly good knowledge of the topic discussed will normally keep their mouth shut and listen because they don’t want to lower themselves to the level of those who don’t know what they’re *talking about*. You’re right though; I am just being obnoxious. That’s part of what I’ve been called to do. And when I get really obnoxious, I turn back another fool. ■

## Puritans

From Page 1

Of course, scholars today do not perceive the Decian persecution as having had such repercussions. That is not surprising. We wouldn't expect Pretenders to identify the actions of their own in that way. Nevertheless, the disagreement over what to do with those who denied Christ during the great persecution of Emperor Decius led to a definite parting of the ways. Christians who wanted to exclude those who had committed apostasy went one way in an effort to preserve the holiness of the Body of Christ. Christians who chose to extend them mercy went another.

Those who called for exclusion of the Pretenders who apostasized during the persecution were labeled heretic and excommunicated by the Church leaders who went on to create the Roman Catholic Church. That Church eventually extended God's supposedly unconditional mercy to the entire Western world.

Sadly, however, the decision to readmit the Pretenders who had denied Christ polluted the purity of the Body of Christ that the persecution achieved. Not only that, the policy of penance the Pretenders introduced shortly thereafter allowed ever greater numbers of Pretenders to remain in the Church while bringing the Church hierarchy greater prosperity with each passing decade. Then, as now, Christian leaders had a tendency to look at the bottom line.

As you have learned through previous articles in this newsletter, the Church had lost most of *The Apostolic Teaching* by the end of the second century A.D. Although some in the Church at that time, men like Hippolytus and Tertullian, still understood a remnant of that *Teaching* and desperately sought to preserve it, by A.D. 250 such individuals were in a rapidly dwindling minority.

[See "Did You Mean That Literally?" *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1993, for a discussion of Tertullian's (A.D. 155–220?) contribution to the preservation of orthodoxy; see "That's Why He's Called Antichrist!" *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1992, as well as *The AntiChrist* and *The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist* for some of Hippolytus'

(A.D. 170?–235) works with discussion of his contribution to orthodoxy.]

In the last issue I mentioned the influence "the rule of faith" had on the formulation of the Apostles' Creed. (See "The Apostles' Creed and the Search for Orthodoxy," *The Voice of Elijah*, October 1993.) Some scholars point to "the rule" as being a comprehensive body of teaching extant in the second-century Church. If that be so, "the rule" could easily have been *The Teaching* that Jesus Christ commanded the Apostles to transmit to the Church (Matt. 28:18–20).

However that may be, by the middle of the third century, most Church leaders had only a fragmentary understanding of *The Apostolic Teaching*. Some may have had none at all. That is where we meet Cyprian and Novatian. Both men claimed knowledge of the "the rule of faith" Tertullian mentions, and scholars recognize that both contributed to the preservation of the doctrinal truths outlined in the Creed. (See *The Voice of Elijah*, October 1993, pp. 21, 22.) So these two third-century Church leaders probably had at least a rudimentary knowledge of *The Apostolic Teaching*.

***"Those who called for exclusion of the Pretenders who apostasized during the persecution were labeled heretic and excommunicated by the Church leaders."***

Tertullian definitely knew and understood *The Apostolic Teaching*. And his writings directly influenced both Cyprian and Novatian. Cyprian read his works extensively, referring to him as "the master." Novatian's monumental treatise on the Trinity, *De Trinitate*, clearly exhibits language he derived from reading Tertullian. In fact, where Tertullian appeals to "the rule of faith," Novatian calls it "the rule of Truth."

Even though these two Church leaders drew their teaching from the same source, Novatian stands more in line with Tertullian spiritually. Like Tertullian, he

quit the Church in protest over the issue of readmitting those who denied Christ during persecution. That happened after he and Cyprian disagreed over the issues of Church discipline and the authority of the priesthood. The catalyst for their debate, however, was the problem of how to deal with those who denied Christ during the persecution of Decius.

## ***Persecution Prior to A.D. 250***

The history of the Church before A.D. 250 contains numerous accounts of persecution of Christians, each initiated for different reasons. The New Testament Book of Acts describes persecution by the Jews (Acts 7:54–8:3). Nero persecuted the Christians of Rome in A.D. 64, claiming they set the great fire which consumed the city in that same year. Christians fell victim again under Emperors like Hadrian (A.D. 117–138) and Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180), both of whom campaigned for a return to the state religion of the Roman Empire.

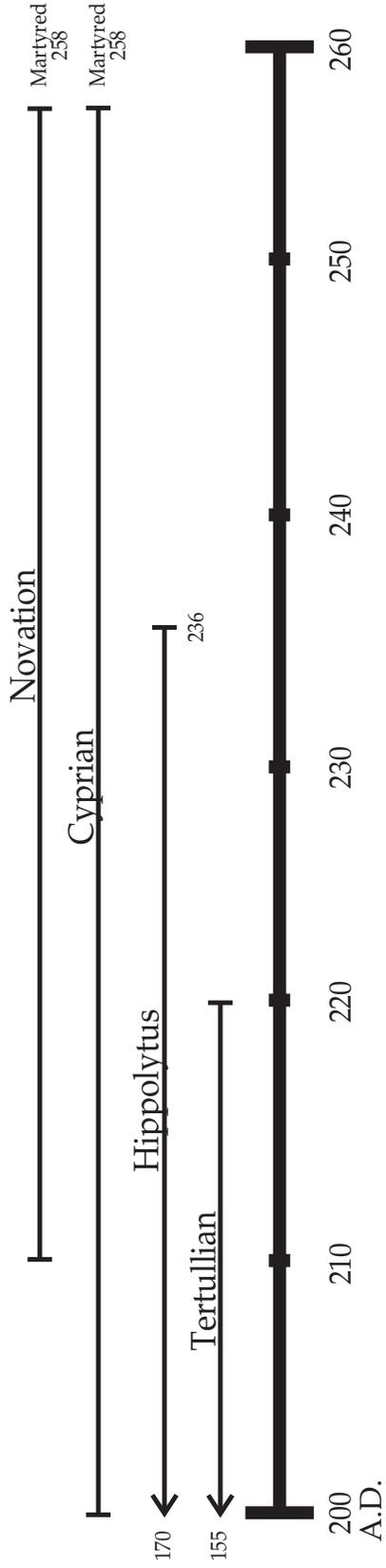
In a letter he wrote to Emperor Trajan, Pliny (governor of the province of Bythnia in Asia Minor from A.D. 109–111) asked for direction on how to deal with Christians:

*It is my rule, Sire, to refer to you in matters where I am uncertain. For who can better direct my hesitation or instruct my ignorance? I was never present at any trial of Christians; therefore I do not know what are the customary penalties or investigations, and what limits are observed. I have hesitated a great deal on the question whether there should be any distinction of ages; whether the weak should have the same treatment as the more robust; whether those who recant should be pardoned, or whether a man who has ever been a Christian should gain nothing by ceasing to be such; whether the name itself, even if innocent of crime, should be punished, or only the crimes attaching to that name.*

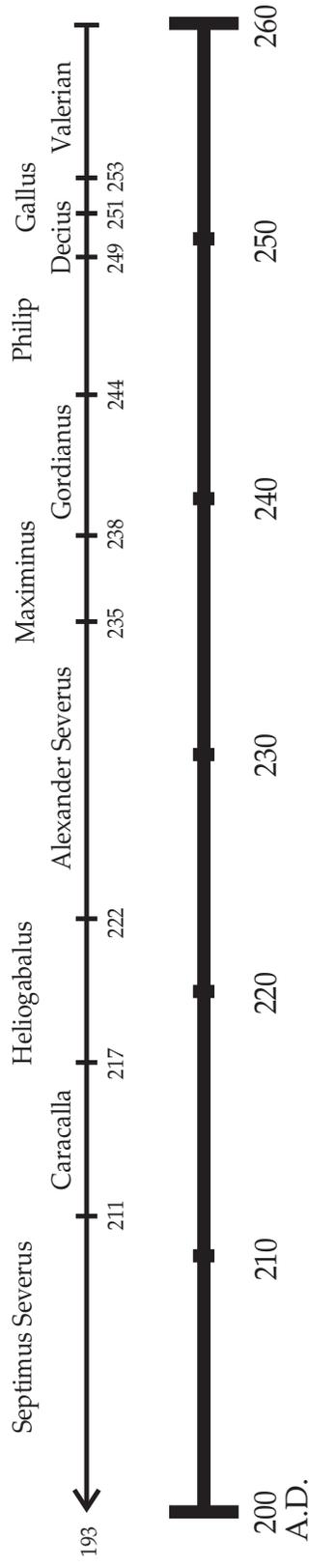
(Documents of the Christian Church, Henry Bettenson, ed., New York: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 3)

Pliny goes on to describe some of the cases brought before him and the

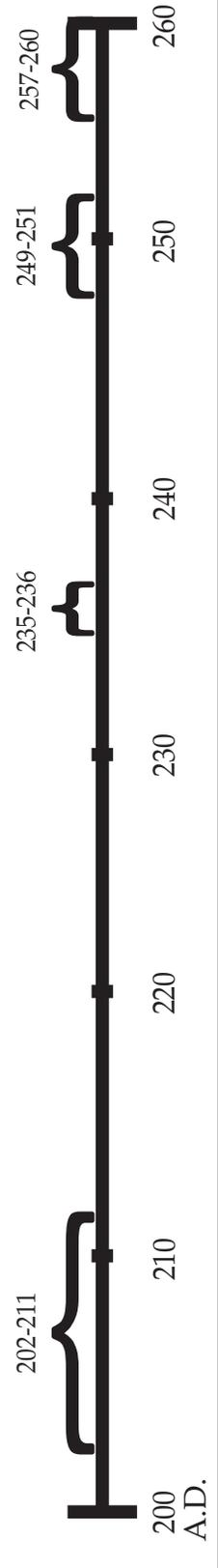
### Church Fathers



### Roman Emperors



### Persecutions



punishments he elected to inflict. Trajan responded with the following edict:

*You have taken the right line, my dear Pliny, in examining the cases of those denounced to you as Christians, for no hard and fast rule can be laid down, of universal application. They are not to be sought out; if they are informed against, and the charge is proved, they are to be punished, with this reservation—that if any one denies that he is a Christian, and actually proves it, that is by worshipping our gods, he shall be pardoned as a result of his recantation, however suspect he may have been with respect to the past. Pamphlets published anonymously should carry no weight in any charge whatsoever. They constitute a very bad precedent, and are also out of keeping with this age. (Ibid., p. 4)*

This edict stood for more than a century. Its wording was such that subsequent emperors could enforce, ignore, or suppress it as they saw fit. Hadrian (A.D. 117–138) followed Trajan's lead in directing his proconsuls to punish only those Christians who were convicted of crimes. Antoninus Pius (A.D. 137–161) is believed to have tried to protect Christians from persecution, but was not entirely successful. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, was martyred during his reign. (See "The Letter of the Smyrnaeans" in *The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist* for an account of Polycarp's martyrdom.)

The above-mentioned persecutions were for the most part confined to provinces in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Under Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 161–180), however, persecutions spread to other parts of the empire. For example, Justin Martyr was executed during this time in Rome. (See "Did You Mean That Literally?" *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1993, for a discussion of Justin Martyr's contribution to the preservation of orthodoxy in the Church.)

After a brief respite under Commodus (A.D. 180–192), persecution resumed under Septimus Severus (A.D. 193–211). After Septimus enacted a law against the further spread of Christianity (ca. A.D. 202), persecution centered in Egypt and North Africa. Many of the Montanists, the ascetic sect that Tertullian joined in the later years of his life, were martyred at that time.

Persecution continued during the reign of Caracalla (A.D. 211–217), though he passed no new laws against Christians. The reign of Heliogabalus (A.D. 218–222) brought another short respite, but persecution returned briefly under Maximinus (A.D. 235–238). Then the Church enjoyed more than a decade of peace under Gordianus (A.D. 238–244) and Philip (A.D. 244–249).

All the persecutions just mentioned shared a common characteristic—they did not occur simultaneously throughout the entire Roman Empire. When Decius came to the throne, everything changed.

### The Heavenly Rebuke

In A.D. 249, Decius was proclaimed emperor. Seeking to restore the Old Roman order to the Empire, he ordered the pagan state religion reinstated throughout the Roman Empire. To that end, he published an edict in A.D. 250 requiring all citizens to perform a sacrifice before Roman officials and obtain a certificate saying they had done so. Those who refused were imprisoned or executed.

Unlike earlier persecutions, this one was instituted throughout the entire Roman Empire. It not only unmasked a greater number of Pretenders than any other, it also produced a greater number of Christian martyrs. Some of the atrocities these Believers suffered were recorded by the fourth-century historian, Eusebius. Here, Eusebius recounts a description given by Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria:

*They led a woman called Quinta, who was a believer, to the temple of an idol, and attempted to force her to worship; but when she turned away in disgust, they tied her by the feet, and dragged her through the whole city, over the rough stones of the paved streets, dashing her against the millstones, and scourging her at the same time, until they brought her to the same place, where they stoned her.*

(Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, Chap. XLI, *Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993*, p. 257)

Christians had actually enjoyed favor under Emperor Philip, and as a result, the Church had grown and prospered. This rapid growth resulted in

a deterioration of Christian morality and purity, however, and many Christians believed the persecution under Decius was God's judgment on His Church. Indeed, Cyprian himself referred to it as "the heavenly rebuke":

*The Lord has desired His family to be proved; and because a long peace had corrupted the discipline that had been divinely delivered to us, the heavenly rebuke has aroused our faith, which was giving way, and I had almost said slumbering; and although we deserved more for our sins, yet the most merciful Lord has so moderated all things, that all which has happened has rather seemed a trial than a persecution.*

(Cyprian, "The Treatises of Cyprian," *Treatise III*, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1867, Volume V*, p. 438)

Decius directed the persecution mainly at Church leaders. Most likely, he expected the Christian laypeople to recant more readily if their leaders could be forced to do so. He probably also assumed the deaths of those leaders who would not recant would destabilize the entire Church. So, the bishops Babylas of Antioch, Alexander of Jerusalem and Fabian of Rome died as martyrs. Other bishops, Dionysius of Alexandria and Cyprian of Carthage among them, went into hiding.

Many nominal Christians, however, decided to avoid the loss of property and the possibility of bodily harm. These Christian Pretenders fell into two categories: Those who promptly went to the temple to make public sacrifice to the Roman gods—the *sacrificati*—and those who procured a certificate of sacrifice (a *libellus*, see graphic below) without actually performing the sacrifice—the *libellatici*. Both became known as "the lapsed" (Latin: *de lapsis*).

Of the two categories, Church leaders viewed the *sacrificati* as having committed the greater sin since they physically participated in the sacrifice and in the sacrificial meal. Although they also considered the *libellatici* sinners, they believed their transgression was somehow less severe. A third class of *lapsi* recanted only after torture. Church leaders looked upon these with even less severity.

Before the persecution ended, some who had denied Christ came to regret their apostasy. They began to entreat the Church for forgiveness and restoration to fellowship. Whether to grant their request became once again a subject of heated debate among Church leaders. The outcome was inevitable. Twice before Church leaders—Tertullian and Hippolytus—had left the Church contending restoration of those who denied Christ during persecution was not possible. This time was to be no different.

### ***Cyprian and God's Mercy***

Thascius Caecilius Cyprianus (Cyprian), the bishop of the Church in Carthage, was a prominent advocate of leniency for the lapsed and began his advocacy on their behalf while still in hiding during the persecution. After returning to Carthage when the persecution ended, he continued to argue for leniency. His views seem to have been more the result of his privileged background and rapid rise to the position of bishop than from anything he learned from Tertullian.

Cyprian was born into an apparently well-to-do Carthaginian family around A.D. 200. He is believed to have been

converted by Caecilius, a presbyter who lived with his family. We know few details of his life before his conversion to Christianity, but one can deduce from his own words that he was accustomed to associating with the higher circles of Carthaginian society:

*I used to regard it as a difficult matter, and especially as difficult in respect of my character at that time, that a man should be capable of being born again ... When does he learn thrift who has been used to liberal banquets and sumptuous feasts? And he who has been glittering in gold and purple, and has been celebrated for his costly attire, when does he reduce himself to ordinary and simple clothing? One who has felt the charm of the fasces and of civic honours shrinks from becoming a mere private and inglorious citizen. (Cyprian, "The Epistles of Cyprian," Epistle I, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1867 Volume V, pp. 275–276)*

After conversion, Cyprian sold his estates, giving the proceeds to the poor, and, taking a vow of chastity, was baptized in either A.D. 245 or 246. He apparently led an exemplary Christian life since he was

elected to the presbytery of the Carthaginian Church a year later. The following year, after the death of the bishop, Cyprian was elevated to that office through popular demand, with no regard for his comparatively young age and in spite of his own objections.

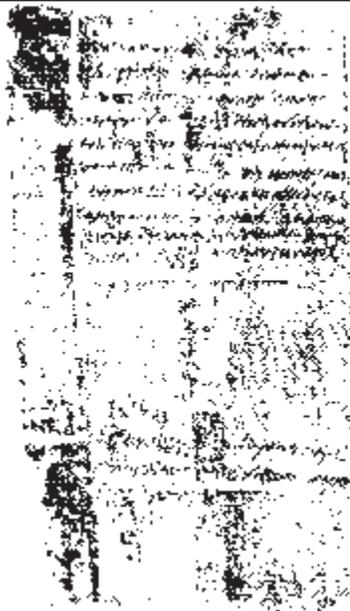
When persecution broke out in A.D. 249, Cyprian elected to go into hiding, from whence he conducted the affairs of his office by correspondence. He wrote prolifically during this time, sending letters of encouragement and instruction to the presbytery in Carthage and to Church leaders in other parts of the Empire as well. Much of this correspondence dealt with the issue of the lapsed.

Cyprian soon learned that presbyters in the Carthaginian Church were granting forgiveness to many who regretted having apostatized in the early days of the persecution. When the lapsed sought reconciliation to God and the Church, the leaders allowed them to participate in the Lord's Supper. Cyprian condemned this practice, not because the lapsed were granted forgiveness, but because it was granted too soon:

*And to the lapsed indeed pardon may be granted in respect of this thing. For what dead person would not hasten to be made alive? Who would not be eager to attain his own salvation? ... let them wait for ripe and peaceable times to give peace at your requests. The first thing is, that the Mother should first receive peace from the Lord, and then, in accordance with your wishes, that the peace of her children should be considered. (Ibid., Epistle X, p. 291)*

Cyprian made it clear that to recant in the face of persecution was a serious offense. Therefore, the penitent should not expect easy reinstatement to their former position in God's Church. He advocated pardon be granted only after the persecution was over, stating that allowing them to return to the Church before then was an affront to the suffering of the martyrs and confessors (those who endured persecution and lived). After the persecution ended, Cyprian wrote his treatise "On The Lapsed" in which he said:

*But you, beloved brethren, whose fear is ready towards God, and whose mind, although it is placed in the midst of lapse, is*



#### TRANSLATION:

TO THE COMMISSIONERS FOR SACRIFICES IN THE VILLAGE OF ALEXANDER'S ISLAND, FROM AURELIUS DIOGENES, SON OF SATABUS, OF THE VILLAGE OF ALEXANDER'S ISLAND, AGED 72; SCAR ON RIGHT EYEBROW.

I have always sacrificed to the gods, and now in your presence, in accordance with the terms of the edict, I have done sacrifice and to poured libations and tasted the sacrifices, and I request you to certify to this effect. Farewell.  
PRESENTED BY ME, AURELIUS DIOGENES.

I CERTIFY THAT I WITNESSED HIS SACRIFICE, AURELIUS SYRUS.

Dated this first year of the Emperor Caesar Gaius Messias Quintus Trajanus Decius, Pius, Felix, Augustus, the 2nd of Epiph. (26 June 250)

A *libellus*, or certificate of sacrifice, like the one above was issued to all who fulfilled the requirements of Emperor Decius' edict. Many Christians procured these certificates through bribery. They hoped to thereby avoid the loss of prop-

erty and physical torture that the confessors suffered without actually partaking of the sacrificial meal. Those who did so were called the *libellatici*. The papyrus pictured above was discovered at Fayoum, Egypt, in 1893. □

**“Any who dissented with the practice of restoring the lapsed were censured and, if they did not change their views, excommunicated.”**

*mindful of its misery, do you in repentance and grief look into your sins; acknowledge the very grave sin of your conscience; open the eyes of your heart to the understanding of your sin, neither despairing of the Lord's mercy nor yet at once claiming His pardon.... You must pray more eagerly and entreat; you must spend the day in grief; wear out nights in watchings and weepings; occupy all your time in wailful lamentations; lying stretched on the ground, you must cling close to the ashes, be surrounded with sackcloth and filth; after losing the raiment of Christ, you must be willing now to have no clothing; after the devil's meat, you must prefer fasting; be earnest in righteous works, whereby sins may be purged; frequently apply yourself to almsgiving, whereby your souls are freed from death.... If a man make prayer with his whole heart, if he groan with the true lamentations and tears of repentance, if he incline the Lord to pardon of his sin by righteous and continual works, he who expressed His mercy in these words may pity such men: "When you turn and lament, then shall you be saved, and shall know where you have been."*

*(Cyprian, "The Treatises of Cyprian," Treatise III, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1867, Volume V, pp. 446-447)*

When persecution began again under Emperor Valerian, Cyprian submitted to capture, and in A.D. 258 became the first North African bishop to die as a martyr. At that time his view on how to deal with the lapsed became the accepted view of the orthodox Church. Any who dissented with the practice of restoring the lapsed were censured and, if they did not change their views, excommunicated. Novatian and his followers were among those who chose to dissent.

### ***Novatian and the Cathari***

Little is known of Novatian's early life. He converted to Christ as an adult in Rome and was not considered qualified for ordination as a priest because he received baptism on his sick bed. He was ordained nonetheless while Fabian was

still bishop. After Fabian died as a martyr in the persecution, Novatian conducted all official correspondence for the Roman Church until a bishop could be elected. It was during this time that he wrote to Cyprian concerning the lapsed. He said:

*In our endeavors to steer a middle course in these difficult matters, we ... came to the conclusion some time ago that there is no innovation before the election of a Bishop. We believe, however, that the treatment of the lapsed is to be handled with discretion. Meanwhile, however, while we wait for God to give us a Bishop, the cases of those who can bear to wait should be kept in abeyance. But those of the lapsed whose death is imminent and who can suffer no delay, after they have manifested their repentance and repeatedly and openly declared their abhorrence of what they have done, and if they have given signs of genuine sorrow and repentance by their tears, their sighs, their sobs, and when there remains, as far as we can humanly ascertain, no hope of life, then and only then are they to be aided with the proper care and solicitude. God knows what to do with them and how to balance the scales of His justice.*

*(Novatian, Letter 1, Chapter 8, The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 67, R.J. De Simone, trans., Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1974, p. 194)*

This letter actually survived as part of Cyprian's collection. In it we find a stance not much different from his own. Novatian grants that prayers and the laying on of hands may be given to the lapsed who are on the verge of death as "the proper care and solicitude." But he is willing to consign them to the righteous judgment of God rather than to hastily allow them reinstatement to Church fellowship. Novatian makes such statements in two other letters he wrote to Cyprian during the time the Roman Church remained without a bishop. In them he expresses concern over the demands the lapsed were making for speedy reconciliation. Here his stance is, like Cyprian's, that they ought to wait until the end of the persecution before their case is decided:

*The wound of the lapsed is still fresh and still swelling. Therefore, we are certain that when they have been given more time to recover and their excessive impatience has waned, they will appreciate postponement for the purpose of receiving reliable treatment. (Novatian, Letter 3, Chapter 3, p. 203)*

Unfortunately, we have no other literature in which Novatian specifically deals with the issue of the lapsed. We can see he offered no definite prescriptions for their readmittance to the Church, but rather displayed a concern for preserving the purity of the Body of Christ. He did not leave the lapsed totally without hope at this time, but was not willing to grant "a too ready pardon for wicked men to praise" (Letter 1, Chapter 8, p. 194). He preferred to appeal to the judgment of God and wait for the appointment of a bishop to the office he temporarily filled.

In A.D. 251 after the persecution of Decius had subsided, the Roman presbytery finally elected a bishop. They elected a man named Cornelius, who sided with Cyprian in the decision to receive the lapsed. Novatian strongly protested their decision to appoint Cornelius to the bishopric. He evidently did so because he had, in the interim, developed a more stringent stance concerning what to do with the lapsed than what he expressed in the letters above. Novatian eventually concluded the lapsed should be forever excommunicated from the Church.

After the presbytery elected Cornelius bishop of the Church in Rome, Novatian had himself appointed to that same office (some say he was appointed by others against his will). Thus he became the second "Protestant" anti-pope over the Roman Church. Hippolytus was the first such "Protestant" leader, having left the Church during the bishopric of Calixtus (A.D. 217-222), in part because of his disagreement with the Church over readmission of the lapsed in his day. (See "Poetry Ain't All Bad," *The Voice of Elijah Update*, February 1993.)

Most of what we know about the controversy concerning the lapsed was written by Novatian's detractors. Conse-

quently, Christian historians have not been kind to Novatian until recently. None of his own writings provide insight into how he defended his actions. It is known, however, that his followers called themselves the *Cathari*, or “Puritans.” It is no surprise that the Novatianists adopted that name. Like their 17th-century Protestant counterparts, they were concerned about the purity of the Body of Christ. Their position was that allowing the lapsed back in would defile the purity of the Church.

After his election as bishop, Cornelius carried on a long correspondence with Cyprian, who endorsed his appointment to the office. In it Cyprian condemned the actions of Novatian and his followers. That could be expected, as he was most zealous for the unity of the Catholic Church and sought the immediate censure of any schism. He said as much in a letter to Cornelius:

*And lest their [the Cathari’s] raging boldness should ever cease, they are striving here also to distract the members of Christ into schismatical parties, and to cut and tear the one body of the Catholic Church, so that, running about from door to door, through the houses of many, or from city to city, through certain districts, they seek for companions in their obstinacy and error to join to themselves in their schism. To whom we have once given this reply, nor shall we cease to command them to lay aside their pernicious dissensions and disputes, and to be aware that it is an impiety to forsake their Mother; and to acknowledge and understand that when a bishop is once made and approved by the testimony and judgment of his colleagues and the people, another can by no means be appointed.* (Cyprian, “The Epistles of Cyprian,” Epistle XL, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1867, Volume V, p. 319)

Cornelius also wrote a letter to Fabian, the bishop of Antioch, describing Novatian’s heretical actions. In it he stated Novatian had three bishops from the South of Italy brought to Rome. After getting them drunk, he coerced them into laying hands on him to ordain him as bishop. Later, one of these returned to the Church with some of Novatian’s follow-

ers. Cornelius speaks of them as follows:

*“These men, therefore, as they knew him [Novatian], and had well sounded his artifice and duplicity, as also his perjuries and falsehoods, his dissocial and savage character, returned to the holy church, and announced all his devices and wickedness, which he had for a long time dissembled within himself, and this too in the presence of many bishops; and the same also, in the presence of many presbyters, and a great number of laymen, at the same time lamenting and sorrowing that they had been seduced, and had abandoned the church for a short time, through the agency of that artful and malicious beast.”*

(Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Chapter XLIII, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids: 1991, p. 264)

Cornelius even accused Novatian of having survived the Decian persecution by denying he was a presbyter. Portrayed as a monster by his contemporaries, Novatian has received somewhat better treatment by recent scholars. Some point out that Cornelius’ description of the man cannot be entirely accurate if Fabian esteemed him highly enough to appoint him to the presbytery in the first place. It is also difficult, in the light of his surviving works, especially his treatise “On The Trinity,” to view the man in such a derogatory light.

Unfortunately, there is not much evidence to vindicate Novatian of the accusations his contemporaries brought against him. He and his followers were excommunicated from the Church in A.D. 251. He was later martyred during the persecution under Valerian (A.D. 257–260). Novatianism and the *Cathari*, however, survived for several centuries thereafter as a separate “Protestant” Church.

### **The Keys of the Kingdom**

Cyprian’s writings contributed directly to the development of the Roman Catholic doctrine of the authority of apostolic succession. In fact, Cyprian is called the “Father of the Catholic Church” because his disagreement with the Novatianists dealt not so much with the lapsed as it did with church discipline and the authority of the priesthood.

Cyprian’s view concerning the apostolic authority Christ bestowed on the Church stands behind his advocacy of lenient treatment of the lapsed. It not only explains his belief that Church leaders had the authority to receive the lapsed back into the Church, it also accounts for his intolerance of schism, regardless of the reasons. He believed there was no salvation outside the Church, so the lapsed could do nothing but seek reconciliation. Therefore, the Church had both the obligation and the authority to grant them what they sought:

*For it was not right, neither did the love of the Father nor divine mercy allow, that the Church should be closed to those that knock, or the help of the hope of salvation be denied to those who mourn and entreat, so that when they pass from this world, they should be dismissed to their Lord without communion and peace; since He Himself who gave the law, that things which were bound on earth should also be bound in heaven, allowed, moreover, that things might be loosed there which were here first loosed in the Church.*

(Cyprian, “The Epistles of Cyprian,” Epistle LIII, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1867, Volume V, pp. 336–337)

In this passage Cyprian alludes to the keys of the kingdom Jesus mentions in Matthew 16:19. Let’s look at that passage to see what he was thinking:

*He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” And Simon Peter answered and said, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal [this] to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

(Matthew 16:15–19)

In alluding to the keys of the kingdom, Cyprian was appealing to the authority Jesus gave Peter and the Apostles

to bind and loose. He believed that *meant* the Church had authority to retain or remit sin. Therefore, he advocated the remission of the sin of the lapsed on the basis of the authority Church leaders gained through apostolic succession. On that same basis he was quick to condemn anyone who questioned the authority of the presbytery. Those who did so were questioning the authority of Jesus Christ Himself. That is why Cyprian believed Church leaders could grant the lapsed forgiveness in one breath and excommunicate the Puritan schismatics in the next.

One of the curiosities in Cyprian's reasoning in favor of the lapsed lies in his use of some very clearly stated New Testament passages. In his Treatise III, "On the Lapsed" he says this:

*In the Gospel the Lord speaks, and says, "Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I also confess before my Father which is in heaven: but he that denieth me, him will I also deny." If He does not deny him that denies, neither does He confess him that confesses; the Gospel cannot be sound in one part and waver in another. Either both must stand firm, or both must lose the force of truth. If they who deny shall not be guilty of a crime, neither shall they who confess receive the reward of a virtue. Again, if faith which has conquered be crowned, it is of necessity that faithlessness which is conquered should be punished.* (Cyprian, "The Treatises of Cyprian," Treatise III, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., The Ante-Nicene Fathers, 1867, Volume V, p. 443)

That is a quotation from Luke 12: 8-9. The larger passage of Luke 12:1-12 seems to leave little room for doubt. It deals with the subject of the fear of death during persecution. Cyprian's use of the passage shows that he sees its direct application to the problem of the lapsed. He even says "faithlessness which is conquered should be punished." Therefore, one would expect him to conclude there can be no reconciliation for such people. But look at the conclusion to which he finally comes:

*He who has thus made atonement to God; he who by repentance for his deed, who by shame for his sin, has conceived*

*more both of virtue and of faith from the very grief of his fall, heard and aided by the Lord, shall make the Church which he had lately saddened glad, and shall now deserve of the Lord not only pardon, but a crown.* (Ibid., p. 447)

Huh? Did he just say that those who deny Christ during persecution and later repent of that deed will be better for it? That the Church will be better for their readmittance? That they will actually receive a crown in that Day? How could he come to that conclusion? One can be sure his concept of the authority of the Church to forgive sin plays a large part. It seems, however, that he might also have thought apostolic authority gave Church leaders the right to ignore what the Scriptures state plainly. Let's be careful, now. The passage he quoted from Luke 12 contains an extremely sobering statement following right on the heels of what Jesus said about His denial of those who deny Him:

*"And everyone who will speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but he who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him."* (Luke 12:10)

Could that *mean* denial of Christ under persecution is in some way tied to blasphemy against the Holy Spirit? Apparently Cyprian didn't think so. Or perhaps he believed he and other Church leaders could even forgive blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. (For a discussion of the subject of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, see "How Quickly They Do Blasphe-me," *The Voice of Elijah*, October 1992.)

Cyprian's opponent Novatian appealed to the same passage in his first letter to Cyprian on behalf of the Roman Church. Look at what he says:

*One must take into consideration, not only divine clemency, but also divine severity. For as it is written: "Iforgave you all the debt, because you did entreat Me"; so is it also written: "Whoever disowns Me before men, I will also disown before My Father and before His angels." God is compassionate, but He also demands—indeed, He strictly demands—the observance of His precepts. He invites guests to His wedding ban-*

*quet, but the man who wears no wedding garment He has cast out by his hands and feet from the assembly of the saints. He has prepared heaven, but He has also prepared Tartarus. He has prepared refreshment, but He has also prepared eternal punishment. He has prepared inaccessible light, but He has also prepared the desolate and eternal darkness of perpetual night.* (Novatian, Letter 1, Chapter 7, pp. 193-194)

Novatian's comments on Luke 12, combined with his actions after the ordination of Cornelius, tell us that he evidently came to a different conclusion concerning Christ's words. He believed it was the responsibility of the Church to discipline those who did not observe God's precepts, even to the point of permanently excluding them from "the assembly of the saints."

## ***Pretenders and Their Blasphemy***

So, what does all this have to do with Pretenders in the Church today? Everything. The Pretenders like Cyprian who favored extending the unconditional mercy of God to the lapsed in the third century went on to gain absolute control of the Church hierarchy through the doctrine of apostolic succession. The fallacy of that doctrine eventually led to the Protestant Reformation.

Prior to the third-century controversies that arose over the readmission of the lapsed, it was customary for Church leaders to permanently excommunicate those who denied Christ. But when some of the thousands of Pretenders who had committed apostasy during the Decian persecution wanted to come back into the Church, those Pretenders in positions of authority who had avoided death themselves by hiding during the persecution reconsidered.

As a result of the ensuing debate over what to do with the lapsed, the "Protestants" ended up outside the orthodox Church once again just as was the case with Tertullian and Hippolytus. By this time the orthodox Church was quickly becoming orthodox in name only. Having lost *The Apostolic Teaching* half a century earlier, it now lost all

***“The Pretenders like Cyprian who favored extending the unconditional mercy of God to the lapsed in the third century went on to gain absolute control of the Church hierarchy through the doctrine of apostolic succession.”***

hope of retaining the purity of the collective body of Believers.

Shortly after the Decian persecution, the Pretenders in control of the Church introduced the blasphemy known as “penance.” With the introduction of penance as accepted Church practice, maintaining the purity of God’s assembly of the saints was no longer possible. Pretenders knew they could easily leave the Church during persecution and come right back in afterward. That completely thwarted God’s attempts to purify the Church of Pretenders by subjecting it to persecution. Less than a century later, Christianity had lost its stigma and was a state religion.

By the end of the third century, the practice of penance had developed into a science. Those excluded from Church fellowship because of some mortal sin, including apostasy, could easily gain readmittance by advancing through the four classes of the penitent:

*(1) The Weepers, who prostrated themselves at the church doors in mourning garments and implored restoration from the clergy and the people.*

*(2) The Hearers, who, like the catechumens called by the same name, were allowed to hear the Scripture lessons and the sermon.*

*(3) The Kneelers, who attended the public prayers, but only in the kneeling posture.*

*(4) The Standers, who could take part in the whole worship standing, but were still excluded from the communion.*

*(Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, Vol. II, Wm. B. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989, p. 189)*

A penitent could advance through the ranks in about three years if all went well. By twentieth-century Protestant standards those practices may seem a little extreme. But don’t we still submit to various requirements for admission to religious organizations? We don’t consider those requirements too high a price

to pay, do we? And the best thing about it from the perspective of the Pretenders is they can easily fulfill some rigorous external requirement without changing a thing about who they actually are. Pride of accomplishment stands in place of a humble submission to God.

The third-century Church after Cyprian sounds a lot like the Church today, doesn’t it? There is no sin that God won’t forgive. So you don’t have to worry about denying Christ or blaspheming the Holy Spirit. For that matter, you needn’t worry about lying, cheating, stealing, or fornicating either. All you have to do is say the right things afterward. God will always take you back.

That’s exactly the sort of thinking that allowed Pretenders to take over God’s Church in the first place. Cyprian and his cohorts hijacked the Church because they did not believe denial of Christ was an act of the will. They thought it was an inadvertent slip—a fall. The lapsed were pushed into it by desperate circumstances; they couldn’t help it. They were victims, not perpetrators.

In Cyprian’s prescription for reconciliation (see above, p. 25), the penitent’s outward display of contrition was all important. If the lapsed individual exhibited all the right behavior, he or she could expect eventual readmittance to the fellowship of the Church. Isn’t that what the Church today is all about? Don’t they say, “What you believe is not important. What you say makes all the difference”? And if what you say is stated publicly, that’s even better.

Christianity is no longer about a humble and contrite confession of sin followed by an all-out effort to please God alone. It is all about sinful activity followed by an outward show of pious pretense. The Church is full of Pretenders today because Cyprian and his fellow Pretenders decided to grant a bunch of proven Pretenders forgiveness when Christ had already said none was available. Then they locked the doors of the Church wide open by introducing the practice of penance. They did so because they

believed God will always be merciful to the victims of unrighteousness. What they believed about God is true. What they believed about the Pretenders who denied Christ is another matter.

Now, here’s an interesting observation from Pliny’s early second-century memo to Emperor Trajan:

*All who denied that they were or had been Christians I considered should be discharged, because they called upon the gods at my dictation and did reverence, with incense and wine, to your image which I had ordered to be brought forward for this purpose, together with the statues of the deities; and especially because they cursed Christ, a thing which, it is said, genuine Christians cannot be induced to do. (Bettenson, p. 3)*

Even this “heathen” governor could recognize what Cyprian and company would not: “Genuine Christians cannot be induced to” curse Christ. He knew that if he just applied a little pressure, the Pretenders would readily identify themselves. It was one thing to say they wanted to live a Christian life during good times, but to suffer a martyr’s death was quite another.

Don’t worry. That was a long, long time ago. You’ll never be exposed for the pious Pretender that you are. God would never expect His Church to endure such persecution today. Or would He? Come to think of it, that would be a great way to attain a Church “without spot or wrinkle” (Eph. 5:27), wouldn’t it? Nah! It’ll never happen. Even if it did, when you deny Christ, He’ll understand. He knows no one could endure that kind of treatment. He’ll surely take you back when the smoke clears, if you just say you’re sorry.

So go ahead. Pretend that’s the way it is if it makes you feel better. Cyprian and the leaders of the third-century Church have given you all the justification you need. Until next time, you True Believers keep seeking to know and understand the Truth. ■