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The Natural Man Is an Idiot (When It Comes to the Truth)

The following article contains an excerpt from one of the most important works to come out of the Protestant Reformation—John Calvin’s Institutes of the Christian Religion (trans. by Henry Beveridge).

John Calvin (1509–1564) was, next to Martin Luther (ca. 1483–1546), the most influential individual driving force behind the Protestant Reformation. He

was a theologian of immense learning, yet his writings reflect the mind-set of a man whose first concern was always the *Living Word of God*. His works are, therefore, to be read attentively and with due regard for the crucial role he played in the spiritual warfare that found expression in the historical events of his time.

The basic Truth of Christianity that Calvin sought to explain in his writings

has often been distorted by Pretenders who have claimed to be following in his spiritual footsteps—as though deciphering the *meaning* of true Christianity were a mere matter of grammar and semantics. If you are a True Believer, I challenge you to read the following excerpt as though it were a devotional piece of literature. By that I *mean*, as you read, consciously try to identify with the born-again experience that Calvin was using as the basis for his understanding of the Scriptures. In other words, don’t just read *what* he wrote, read *why* he wrote it.

The *meaning* of many of Calvin’s statements eludes the Pretenders just as does the *meaning* of many of the statements of the Apostles. That is because they have never been born again. Consequently, they have no common experiential basis on which to identify with what these men of God have written. If you are a True Believer, you have that essential common ground. Use it to understand the Truth Calvin sought to communicate.

If you read what Calvin has written from the perspective of your own experience as a Fellow-Believer, you can clearly see that he had experienced the new birth (as opposed to the many Pretenders who came after him and distorted the *meaning* of what he wrote). Moreover, Calvin’s own revolutionary experience with God provided the perspective from which he sought always to

HISTORY AND CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY

The Apostles’ Creed and the Search for Orthodoxy

*This is the first in a series of articles concerning HISTORY AND CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY written by Michael H. Clay of **The Voice of Elijah**. The series will investigate specific aspects of Christian Church history for the information of those seeking to understand the history of Christianity.*

The Struggle to Define Orthodoxy

Christianity has, throughout most of its history, been actively concerned with the matter of orthodoxy. That is because, since its early days, Christianity has been subject to differing views as to what is and what is not “orthodox.” From Webster’s definition of *orthodox* as “conforming to the usual beliefs or practices or established doctrines, especially in religion,” we can clearly see that the struggle for Christian orthodoxy concerned disputes over what the “usual beliefs or practices or established doctrines” of the Church ought to be.

Over the centuries, differing views of orthodoxy have resulted in intense controversies. Once a controversy was settled, the prevailing view then became the “orthodox” view of the majority until some new individual or group came

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Letters to the Editor

It's hard to believe that the first issue of *The Voice of Elijah* appeared just three years ago. Since then we have continually worked to increase the number of those who have

access to *The Teaching* we distribute. Thankfully, our efforts have borne abundant fruit. *The Voice of Elijah* readership has grown to over 25 times the number who received the first issue when it was published in 1990. If this growth rate continues, we expect to see a phenomenal increase in the outreach of this ministry over the next three years.

While that is an exciting prospect, there is much to be done before we are equipped to handle such growth. What with publishing the newsletters and *Updates*, and preparing 20,000 pieces of direct mail each month, in addition to filling the daily orders as they come in, our volunteers are already stretched to their limits. Therefore, it is obvious we will have to hire a full-time administrative person before we are able to increase our activity level by any measurable amount.

Unfortunately, to hire someone now would mean substantially decreasing the current level of outreach. That would result in fewer people gaining access to *The Teaching*. So a full-time person will have to wait until the number of subscribers who regularly contribute to this ministry increases. God willing, we won't have to wait long. I feel confident the level of contributions will increase as more and more True Believers recognize the importance of reaching others with *The Teaching* from which they have already benefited.

More importantly, however, having a full-time person at work here will free up time for some of our volunteers to return to working with The Elijah Project. Since *The Voice of Elijah* is simply a vehicle for distributing the material coming out of The Elijah Project, it is imperative that the work there has the people necessary to continue its highest level of production. Obviously, the more The Elijah Project publishes, the more we will have to offer those seeking Truth. Recently, however, several projects, including *The Mystery of Scripture*, have suffered due to lack of manpower.

Before I move on, I want to thank those of you who have joined with us by supporting *The Voice of Elijah* financially (through the Monthly Contributor and The Next Step programs or through your one-time donations). Your contributions have made our recent high levels of outreach possible. And your continued support, along with the support of those who join with us in years to come, will make it possible to reach all True Believers who are still searching for the Truth.

On the Drawing Board

By the time you read this issue, The Elijah Project will be in the final stages of preparing for its first seminar on October 16–17. I have seen a recent outline, and the seminar appears to be shaping up quite well. I expect to learn quite a bit from attending myself.

Even though The Elijah Project is only offering the seminar for our Monthly Contributors, *The Voice of Elijah* has obtained permission to make the information presented there available to all our readers. A set of audiotapes and copies of the seminar syllabus should be ready for distribution by early November. Look for more details concerning that package to arrive in the mail soon. *The Voice of Elijah* will also offer video cassettes of the seminar series to all of our readers. The seminars will not be videotaped live, however, as The Elijah Project had originally planned. Instead, each segment will be filmed separately at a later date. This approach will mean the segments can be filmed in a more appropriate location, and most importantly, it will allow for re-takes, thereby ensuring the videos produced are of the highest quality. Taping is planned to begin sometime next year, and we should have something to offer shortly thereafter. I will keep you posted as more develops.

The Elijah Project has also been working feverishly to finish *The Mystery of Scripture*. It looks like, God willing, you will have Volume 1 in your hands before you read my next "Letters to the Editor." The volunteers have already edited a first draft, and copies of that draft should soon go out to The Next Step contributors for their feedback. From what I have already seen, the book is going to be packed full of information critical to understanding the loss and restoration of *The Teaching*. What you learn in this first volume alone will make it well worth the wait. If all goes well, Volume 2 will follow late next year.

Last July I mentioned Mike Clay was doing research into the historical background of the creeds that came out of the Early Church councils. I also told you that he would be putting that information into a pamphlet, but we had not yet decided how to make that pamphlet available. We have now decided to make the information available in two formats. The first is a new column in this newsletter entitled "HISTORY AND CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY." This issue marks the beginning of that column with an article containing some of what Mike was researching when I wrote this column last July. Each quarter Mike will, in this new feature, examine some aspect of Church history with the goal of giving you background information you need in order to understand how the Church evolved into what it is today.

In addition to the new newsletter feature, we also plan to publish the information Mike is gathering in a second format: *The Voice of Elijah Extra*. This series of historical monographs will focus on particularly important events in Church history. The first issue of *The Extra*, entitled "Statements of Faith," should be completed by early 1994. In it Mike will take a more detailed look at all the creeds of the Christian Church. Future issues of *The Extra* will provide more in-depth coverage of other topics.

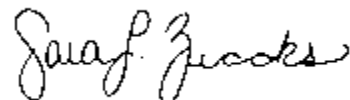
Work also began some months back on a topical index of all the back issues of *The Voice of Elijah*. We initially tried to compile the index manually, but found it to be more time consuming than anticipated. In the last few months, however, we have begun evaluating computer indexing software, and that method looks extremely promising. The goal is to have the index ready for distribution in January, with yearly updates to follow. An index will be a useful tool for those who desire to follow the information presented in the newsletters on particular topics such as idioms and images, the loss of *The Teaching*, parables, etc. That's why I am looking forward to its publication. As you can see, we have several balls in the air. Please join with us in praying that these projects are accomplished quickly and in God's timing for the benefit of all.

Only 85 Shopping Days Left

If you are anything like me, Christmas is the furthest thing from your mind right now. But since I won't have the opportunity to write to you again before then, indulge me for a moment. What better Christmas gift could you give to those you love than the Truth—the one thing that can provide them eternal life. We can't imagine a better way to say you care. That's why we are making a special offer to those readers who wish to give someone a subscription to *The Voice of Elijah* this Christmas. Take a look at the display ad on the dust cover of this issue for details.

Well, time and space require that I say goodbye for yet another quarter. I hope your holiday season is filled with thoughts of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Until January, I'm still

Yours in Him,



Idiot

From Page 1

understand the Scriptures. It is for that reason that his works are most valuable. They provide concise insight into his personal experience with God.

If you choose to read the entirety of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, leave your doctrinal beliefs lying on the title page or, at the very least, somewhere in the Table of Contents, and read his work devotionally. Calvin makes some definite statements concerning specific doctrinal matters in which he advocates the mind-set of the majority of his day. At other times he makes definite statements concerning Christian doctrine where there are apparently two contradictory truths represented in the Scriptures. In cutting the gordian knot, Calvin often gives the eternal perspective. That's why it is so obvious he had been born again. But the scriptural knot was never meant to be cut; it was meant to be untied so as to maintain both perspectives on the one Truth.

Keep in mind, therefore, that because of his own limited grasp of the *parabolic imagery of The Apostolic Teaching*, at points Calvin himself misunderstood, or chose to ignore, some of the statements of the Apostles in which they sought to convey their comprehensive understanding of the parables of the Scriptures. However, you will find Calvin's errors minor in comparison to the amount of Truth his works contain. The vast amount of spiritual insight he has poured into his work is a veritable gold mine. Such effort is not easily duplicated. By contrast, his errors are easily corrected on the basis of an accurate understanding of *The Apostolic Teaching*. It is for those reasons that I highly advocate True Believers read his work. The following is but a taste.

Book II, Chapter II

10. Here, however, I must again repeat what I premised at the outset of this chapter, that **he who is most deeply abased and alarmed, by the consciousness of his disgrace, nakedness, want, and misery, has made the greatest progress in the knowledge of himself.**

Man is in no danger of taking too much from himself, provided he learns that whatever he wants is to be recovered in God. But he cannot arrogate to himself one particle beyond his due, without losing himself in vain confidence, and, by transferring divine honour to himself, becoming guilty of the greatest impiety. And, assuredly, whenever our minds are seized with a longing to possess a somewhat of our own, which may reside in us rather than in God, we may rest assured that the thought is suggested by no other counsellor than he who enticed our first parents to aspire to be like gods, knowing good and evil.

“None are admitted to enjoy the blessings of God save those who are pining under a sense of their own poverty.”

It is sweet, indeed, to have so much virtue of our own as to be able to rest in ourselves; but let the many solemn passages by which our pride is sternly humbled, deter us from indulging this vain confidence: “Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm” (Jer. xvii. 5). “He delighteth not in the strength of the horse; he taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord taketh pleasure in those that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy” (Ps. cxlvii. 10, 11). “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength” (Is. xl. 29–31).

The scope of all these passages is, that we must not entertain any opinion whatever of our own strength, if we would enjoy the favour of God, who “resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James iv. 6). Then let us call to mind such promises as these, “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground” (Is. xlv. 3); “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters” (Is. lv. 1).

These passages declare that **none are admitted to enjoy the blessings of God save those who are pining under a sense of their own poverty.** Nor ought such passages as the following to be omitted: “The sun shall no more be thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory” (Is. lx. 19). The Lord certainly does not deprive his servants of the light of the sun or moon, but as he would alone appear glorious in them, he dissuades them from confidence even in those objects which they deem most excellent.

11. I have always been exceedingly delighted with the words of Chrysostom, “The foundation of our philosophy is humility;” and still more with those of Augustine, “As the orator, when asked, What is the first precept in eloquence? answered, Delivery: What is the second? Delivery: What the third? Delivery: so, if you ask me in regard to the precepts of the Christian Religion, I will answer, first, second, and third, Humility.”

By humility, he means not when a man, with a consciousness of some virtue, refrains from pride, but when he truly feels that he has no refuge but in humility. This is clear from another passage, “Let no man,” says he, “flatter himself: of himself he is a devil: his happiness he owes entirely to God. What have you of your own but sin? Take your sin which is your own; for righteousness is of God.” Again, “Why presume so much on the capability of nature? It is wounded, maimed, vexed, lost. **The thing wanted is genuine confession, not false defence.**”

“When any one knows that he is nothing in himself, and has no help from himself, the weapons within himself are broken, and the war is ended.” All the weapons of impiety must be bruised, and broken, and burnt in the fire; you must remain unarmed, having no help in yourself. The more infirm you are, the more the Lord will sustain you. So, in expounding the seventieth Psalm, he forbids us to remember our own righteousness, in order that we may recognise the righteousness of God, and shows that God bestows his grace upon us, that we may know that we are nothing; that we stand only by the

“As the human mind is unable, from dulness, to pursue the right path of investigation, and, after various wanderings, stumbling every now and then like one groping in darkness, at length gets completely bewildered.”

mercy of God, seeing that in ourselves we are altogether wicked.

Let us not contend with God for our right, as if anything attributed to him were lost to our salvation. As our insignificance is his exaltation, so the confession of our insignificance has its remedy provided in his mercy. I do not ask, however, that man should voluntarily yield without being convinced, or that, if he has any powers, he should shut his eyes to them, that he may thus be subdued to true humility; but that getting quit of the disease of self-love and ambition, φιλαυτία και φιλονεικία, under the blinding influences of which he thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think, he may see himself as he really is, by looking into the faithful mirror of Scripture.

12. I feel pleased with the well-known saying which has been borrowed from the writings of Augustine, that man’s natural gifts were corrupted by sin, and his supernatural gifts withdrawn; meaning by supernatural gifts the light of faith and righteousness, which would have been sufficient for the attainment of heavenly life and everlasting felicity. Man, when he withdrew his allegiance to God, was deprived of the spiritual gifts by which he had been raised to the hope of eternal salvation. Hence it follows, that he is now an exile from the kingdom of God, so that all things which pertain to the blessed life of the soul are extinguished in him until he recover them by the grace of regeneration.

Among these are faith, love to God, charity towards our neighbour, the study of righteousness and holiness. All these, when restored to us by Christ, are to be regarded as adventitious and above nature. If so, we infer that they were previously abolished. **On the other hand, soundness of mind and integrity of heart were, at the same time, withdrawn, and it is this which constitutes the corruption of natural gifts. For although there is still some residue of intelligence and judgment as well as will,**

we cannot call a mind sound and entire which is both weak and immersed in darkness. As to the will, its depravity is but too well known. Therefore, since reason, by which man discerns between good and evil, and by which he understands and judges, is a natural gift, it could not be entirely destroyed; but being partly weakened and partly corrupted, a shapeless ruin is all that remains.

In this sense it is said (John i. 5), that “the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not;” these words clearly expressing both points—viz. that **in the perverted and degenerate nature of man there are still some sparks which show that he is a rational animal, and differs from the brutes, inasmuch as he is endued with intelligence, and yet, that this light is so smothered by clouds of darkness, that it cannot shine forth to any good effect.**

In like manner, the will, because inseparable from the nature of man, did not perish, but was so enslaved by depraved lusts as to be incapable of one righteous desire. The definition now given is complete, but there are several points which require to be explained. Therefore, proceeding agreeably to that primary distinction (Book I. c. xv, sec. 7 and 8), by which we divided the soul into intellect and will, we will now inquire into the power of the intellect.

To charge the intellect with perpetual blindness so as to leave it no intelligence of any description whatever, is repugnant not only to the Word of God, but to common experience. We see that there has been implanted in the human

mind a certain desire of investigating truth, to which it never would aspire unless some relish for truth antecedently existed. There is, therefore, now, in the human mind, discernment to this extent, that it is naturally influenced by the love of truth, the neglect of which in the lower animals is a proof of their gross and irrational nature.

Still it is true that this love of truth fails before it reaches the goal, forthwith falling away into vanity. **As the human mind is unable, from dulness, to pursue the right path of investigation, and, after various wanderings, stumbling every now and then like one groping in darkness, at length gets completely bewildered, so its whole procedure proves how unfit it is to search the truth and find it. Then it labours under another grievous defect, in that it frequently fails to discern what the knowledge is which it should study to acquire. Hence, under the influence of a vain curiosity, it torments itself with superfluous and useless discussions, either not adverting at all to the things necessary to be known, or casting only a cursory and contemptuous glance at them.**

At all events, it scarcely ever studies them in sober earnest. Profane writers are constantly complaining of this perverse procedure, and yet almost all of them are found pursuing it. Hence Solomon, throughout the Book of Ecclesiastes, after enumerating all the studies in which men think they attain the highest wisdom, pronounces them vain and frivolous.

13. Still, however, man’s efforts are not always so utterly fruitless as not to lead to some result, especially when his attention is directed to inferior objects. Nay, even with regard to superior objects, though he is more careless in investigating them, he makes some little progress. Here, however, his ability is more limited, and he is never made more sensible of his weakness than when he attempts to soar above the sphere of the present life.

“We cannot call a mind sound and entire which is both weak and immersed in darkness.”

“We have one kind of intelligence of earthly things, and another of heavenly things.”

It may therefore be proper, in order to make it more manifest how far our ability extends in regard to these two classes of objects, to draw a distinction between them. **The distinction is, that we have one kind of intelligence of earthly things, and another of heavenly things. By earthly things, I mean those which relate not to God and his kingdom, to true righteousness and future blessedness, but have some connection with the present life, and are in a manner confined within its boundaries. By heavenly things, I mean the pure knowledge of God, the method of true righteousness, and the mysteries of the heavenly kingdom.**

To the former belong matters of policy and economy, all mechanical arts and liberal studies. To the latter (as to which, see the eighteenth and following sections) belong the knowledge of God and of his will, and the means of framing the life in accordance with them.

As to the former, the view to be taken is this: Since man is by nature a social animal, he is disposed, from natural instinct, to cherish and preserve society; and accordingly we see that the minds of all men have impressions of civil order and honesty. Hence it is that every individual understands how human societies must be regulated by laws, and also is able to comprehend the principles of those laws. Hence the universal agreement in regard to such subjects, both among nations and individuals, the seeds of them being implanted in the breasts of all without a teacher or lawgiver.

The truth of this fact is not affected by the wars and dissensions which immediately arise, while some, such as thieves and robbers, would invert the rules of justice, loosen the bonds of law, and give free scope to their lust; and while others (a vice of most frequent occurrence) deem that to be unjust which is elsewhere regarded as just, and, on the contrary, hold that to be praiseworthy

which is elsewhere forbidden. For such persons do not hate the laws from not knowing that they are good and sacred, but inflamed with headlong passion, quarrel with what is clearly reasonable, and licentiously hate what their mind and understanding approve.

Quarrels of this latter kind do not destroy the primary idea of justice. **For while men dispute with each other as to particular enactments, their ideas of equity agree in substance. This, no doubt, proves the weakness of the human mind, which, even when it seems on the right path, halts and hesitates. Still, however, it is true, that some principle of civil order is impressed on all. And this is ample proof that, in regard to the constitution of the present life, no man is devoid of the light of reason.**

14. Next come manual and liberal arts, in learning which, as all have some

“The weakness of the human mind, which, even when it seems on the right path, halts and hesitates.”

degree of aptitude, the full force of human acuteness is displayed. But though all are not equally able to learn all the arts, we have sufficient evidence of a common capacity in the fact, that there is scarcely an individual who does not display intelligence in some particular art. And this capacity extends not merely to the learning of the art, but to the devising of something new, or the improving of what had been previously learned. This led Plato to adopt the erroneous idea, that such knowledge was nothing but recollection. So cogently does it oblige us to acknowledge that its principle is naturally implanted in the human mind.

But while these proofs openly attest the fact of an universal reason and intelligence naturally implanted, this universality is of a kind which should lead every individual for himself to recognise it as a special gift of God. To this gratitude we have a sufficient call from the Creator himself, when, in the

case of idiots, he shows what the endowments of the soul would be were it not pervaded with his light.

Though natural to all, it is so in such a sense that it ought to be regarded as a gratuitous gift of his beneficence to each. Moreover, the invention, the methodical arrangement, and the more thorough and superior knowledge of the arts, being confined to a few individuals, cannot be regarded as a solid proof of common shrewdness. Still, however, as they are bestowed indiscriminately on the good and the bad, they are justly classed among natural endowments.

15. Therefore, in reading profane authors, the admirable light of truth displayed in them should remind us, that the human mind, however much fallen and perverted from its original integrity, is still adorned and invested with admirable gifts from its Creator.

If we reflect that the Spirit of God is the only fountain of truth, we will be careful, as we would avoid offering insult to him, not to reject or contemn truth wherever it appears. In despising the gifts, we insult the Giver. How, then, can we deny that truth must have beamed on those ancient lawgivers who arranged civil order and discipline with so much equity?

Shall we say that the philosophers, in their exquisite researches and skilful description of nature, were blind? Shall we deny the possession of intellect to those who drew up rules for discourse, and taught us to speak in accordance with reason? Shall we say that those who, by the cultivation of the medical art, expended their industry in our behalf, were only raving? What shall we say of the mathematical sciences? Shall we deem them to be the dreams of madmen?

Nay, we cannot read the writings of the ancients on these subjects without the highest admiration; an admiration which their excellence will not allow us to withhold. But shall we deem anything to be noble and praiseworthy, without tracing it to the hand of God? Far from us be such ingratitude; an ingratitude not chargeable even on heathen poets, who acknowledged that philosophy and laws, and all useful arts, were the inventions of the gods.

Therefore, since it is manifest that men whom the Scriptures term natural,

“The whole power of intellect thus bestowed is, in the sight of God, fleeting and vain whenever it is not based on a solid foundation of truth.”

are so acute and clear-sighted in the investigation of inferior things, their example should teach us how many gifts the Lord has left in possession of human nature, notwithstanding of its having been despoiled of the true good.

16. Moreover, let us not forget that there are most excellent blessings which the Divine Spirit dispenses to whom he will for the common benefit of mankind. For if the skill and knowledge required for the construction of the Tabernacle behoved to be imparted to Bezaleel and Aholiab, by the Spirit of God (Exod. xxxi. 2; xxxv. 30), it is not strange that the knowledge of those things which are of the highest excellence in human life is said to be communicated to us by the Spirit. Nor is there any ground for asking what concourse the Spirit can have with the ungodly, who are altogether alienated from God?

For what is said as to the Spirit dwelling in believers only is to be understood of the Spirit of holiness, by which we are consecrated to God as temples. Notwithstanding of this, He fills, moves, and invigorates all things by the virtue of the Spirit, and that according to the peculiar nature which each class of beings has received by the Law of Creation.

But if the Lord has been pleased to assist us by the work and ministry of the ungodly in physics, dialectics, mathematics, and other similar sciences, let us avail ourselves of it, lest, by neglecting the gifts of God spontaneously offered to us, we be justly punished for our sloth. Lest any one, however, should imagine a man to be very happy merely because, with reference to the elements of this world, he has been endued with great talents for the investigation of truth, we ought to add, that **the whole power of intellect thus bestowed is, in the sight of God, fleeting and vain whenever it is not based on a solid foundation of truth.**

Augustine (*supra*, sec. 4 and 12), to whom, as we have observed, the Master of Sentences (Lib. ii. Dist. 25) and the Schoolmen are forced to subscribe, says

most correctly, that as the gratuitous gifts bestowed on man were withdrawn, so the natural gifts which remained were corrupted after the fall. Not that they can be polluted in themselves in so far as they proceed from God, but that they have ceased to be pure to polluted man, lest he should by their means obtain any praise.

17. The sum of the whole is this: From a general survey of the human race, it appears that one of the essential properties of our nature is reason, which distinguishes us from the lower animals, just as these by means of sense are distinguished from inanimate objects.

For although some individuals are born without reason, that defect does not impair the general kindness of God, but rather serves to remind us, that whatever we retain ought justly to be ascribed to the Divine indulgence. Had God not so spared us, our revolt would have carried along with it the entire destruction of nature. In that some excel in acuteness, and some in judgment, while others have greater readiness in learning some peculiar art, God, by this variety, commends his favour toward us, lest any one should presume to arrogate to himself that which flows from his mere liberality.

For whence is it that one is more excellent than another, but that in a common nature the grace of God is specially displayed in passing by many, and thus proclaiming that it is under obligation to none. We may add, that each individual is brought under particular influences according to his calling. Many examples of this occur in the Book of Judges, in which the Spirit of the Lord is said to have come upon those whom he called to govern his people (Judges vi. 34).

In short, in every distinguished act there is a special inspiration. Thus it is said of Saul, that “there went with him a band of men whose hearts the Lord had touched” (1 Sam. x. 26). And when his inauguration to the kingdom is foretold, Samuel thus addresses him, “The Spirit of the Lord will come upon thee, and thou

shalt prophesy with them, and shalt be turned into another man” (1 Sam. x. 6). This extends to the whole course of government, as it is afterwards said of David, “The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward” (1 Sam. xvi. 13). The same thing is elsewhere said with reference to particular movements.

Nay, even in Homer, men are said to excel in genius, not only according as Jupiter has distributed to each, but according as he leads them day by day, ὁἷον ἐπ’ ἡμᾶς ἀγῆσι. And certainly experience shows when those who were most skilful and ingenious stand stupified, that the minds of men are entirely under the control of God, who rules them every moment. Hence it is said, that “He poureth contempt upon princes, and causeth them to wander in the wilderness where there is no way” (Ps. cvii. 40). Still, in this diversity we can trace some remains of the divine image distinguishing the whole human race from other creatures.

18. We must now explain what the power of human reason is, in regard to the kingdom of God, and spiritual discernment, which consists chiefly of three things—the knowledge of God, the knowledge of his paternal favour towards us, which constitutes our salvation, and the method of regulating of our conduct in accordance with the Divine Law. With regard to the former two, but more properly the second, men otherwise the most ingenious are blinder than moles.

I deny not, indeed, that in the writings of philosophers we meet occasionally with shrewd and apposite remarks on the nature of God, though they invariably savour somewhat of giddy imagination. As observed above, the Lord has bestowed on them some slight perception of his Godhead, that they might not plead ignorance as an excuse for their impiety, and has, at times, instigated them to deliver some truths, the confession of which should be their own condemnation.

Still, though seeing, they saw not. Their discernment was not such as to direct them to the truth, far less to en-

“Human nature possesses none of the gifts which the elect receive from their heavenly Father through the Spirit of regeneration.”

able them to attain it, but resembled that of the bewildered traveller, who sees the flash of lightning glance far and wide for a moment, and then vanish into the darkness of the night, before he can advance a single step. So far is such assistance from enabling him to find the right path. Besides, how many monstrous falsehoods intermingle with those minute particles of truth scattered up and down in their writings as if by chance.

In short, not one of them even made the least approach to that assurance of the divine favour, without which the mind of man must ever remain a mere chaos of confusion. To the great truths, What God is in himself, and what he is in relation to us, human reason makes not the least approach. (See Book III. c. ii. sec. 14, 15, 16.)

19. But since we are intoxicated with a false opinion of our own discernment, and can scarcely be persuaded that in divine things it is altogether stupid and blind, I believe the best course will be to establish the fact, not by argument, but by Scripture. Most admirable to this effect is the passage which I lately quoted from John, when he says, “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John i. 4, 5).

He intimates that the human soul is indeed irradiated with a beam of divine light, so that it is never left utterly devoid of some small flame, or rather spark, though not such as to enable it to comprehend God. And why so? Because its acuteness is, in reference to the knowledge of God, mere blindness. When the Spirit describes men under the term *darkness*, he declares them void of all power of spiritual intelligence. For this reason, it is said that believers, in embracing Christ, are “born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John i. 13); in other words, that the flesh has no capacity for such sublime wisdom as to apprehend God, and the things of God, unless illumined by his Spirit. In like manner our Saviour, when he was ac-

knowledged by Peter, declared that it was by special revelation from the Father (Matth. xvi. 17).

20. If we were persuaded of a truth which ought to be beyond dispute—viz. that **human nature possesses none of the gifts which the elect receive from their heavenly Father through the Spirit of regeneration**, there would be no room here for hesitation. For thus speaks the congregation of the faithful, by the mouth of the prophet: “With thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we

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see light” (Ps. xxxvi. 9).

To the same effect is the testimony of the apostle Paul, when he declares that “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor. xii. 3). And John the Baptist, on seeing the dullness of his disciples, exclaims, “A man can receive nothing, unless it be given him from heaven” (John iii. 27). That the gift to which he here refers must be understood not of ordinary natural gifts, but of special illumination, appears from this—that he was complaining how little his disciples had profited by all that he had said to them in commendation of Christ. “I see,” says he, “that my words are of no effect in imbuing the minds of men with divine things, unless the Lord enlighten their understandings by His Spirit.”

Nay, Moses also, while upbraiding the people for their forgetfulness, at the same time observes, that they could not become wise in the mysteries of God without his assistance. “Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, unto Pha-

raoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and these great miracles: yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day” (Deut. xxix. 2, 4). Would the expression have been stronger had he called us mere blocks in regard to the contemplation of divine things?

Hence the Lord, by the mouth of the prophet, promises to the Israelites as a singular favour, “I will give them an heart to know me” (Jer. xxiv. 7); intimating, that in spiritual things the human mind is wise only in so far as He enlightens it. This was also clearly confirmed by our Saviour when he said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him” (John vi. 44). Nay, is not he himself the living image of his Father, in which the full brightness of his glory is manifested to us?

Therefore, how far our faculty of knowing God extends could not be better shown than when it is declared, that though his image is so plainly exhibited, we have not eyes to perceive it. What? **Did not Christ descend into the world that he might make the will of his Father manifest to men, and did he not faithfully perform the office? True! He did; but nothing is accomplished by his preaching unless the inner teacher, the Spirit, open the way into our minds. Only those, therefore, come to him who have heard and learned of the Father. And in what is the method of this hearing and learning? It is when the Spirit, with a wondrous and special energy, forms the ear to hear and the mind to understand.**

Lest this should seem new, our Saviour refers to the prophecy of Isaiah, which contains a promise of the renovation of the Church. “For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee” (Is. liv. 7). If the Lord here predicts some special blessing to his elect, it is plain that the teaching to which he refers is not that which is common to them with the ungodly

“Whom does he mean by the ‘natural man’? The man who trusts to the light of nature. Such a man has no understanding in the spiritual mysteries of God.”

and profane.

It thus appears that none can enter the kingdom of God save those whose minds have been renewed by the enlightening of the Holy Spirit. On this subject the clearest exposition is given by Paul, who, when expressly handling it, after condemning the whole wisdom of the world as foolishness and vanity, and thereby declaring man’s utter destitution, thus concludes, “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. ii. 14).

Whom does he mean by the “natural man”? The man who trusts to the light of nature. **Such a man has no understanding in the spiritual mysteries of God.** Why so? Is it because through sloth he neglects them? Nay, though he exert himself, it is of no avail; they are “spiritually discerned.” And what does this mean? That altogether hidden from human discernment, they are made known only by the revelation of the Spirit; so that they are accounted foolishness wherever the Spirit does not give light.

The Apostle had previously declared, that “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him;” nay, that **the wisdom of the world is a kind of veil by which the mind is prevented from beholding God** (1 Cor. ii. 9). What would we more? The Apostle declares that God hath “made foolish the wisdom of this world” (1 Cor. i. 20); and shall we attribute to it an acuteness capable of penetrating to God, and the hidden mysteries of his kingdom? Far from us be such presumption!

21. What the Apostle here denies to man, he, in another place, ascribes to God alone, when he prays, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation” (Eph. i. 17). You now hear that all wisdom and revelation is the gift of God. What follows? “The eyes of your under-

standing being enlightened.” Surely, if they require a new enlightening, they must in themselves be blind. The next words are, “that ye may know what is the hope of his calling” (Eph. i. 18). In other words, **the minds of men have not capacity enough to know their calling.**

Let no prating Pelagian here allege that God obviates this rudeness or stupidity, when, by the doctrine of his word, he directs us to a path which we could not have found without a guide. David had the law, comprehending in it all the wisdom that could be desired and yet not contented with this, he prays, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Ps. cxix. 18). By this expression, he certainly intimates, that it is like sunrise to the earth when the word of God shines forth; but that men do not derive much benefit from it until he himself, who is for this reason called the Father of lights (James i. 17), either gives eyes or opens them; because, whatever is not illuminated by his Spirit is wholly darkness.

The Apostles had been duly and amply instructed by the best of teachers. Still, as they wanted the Spirit of truth to complete their education in the very doctrine which they had previously heard, they were ordered to wait for him (John xiv. 26). If we confess that what we ask of God is lacking to us, and He by the very thing promised intimates our want, no man can hesitate to acknowledge that he is able to understand the mysteries of God,

“It thus appears that none can enter the kingdom of God save those whose minds have been renewed by the enlightening of the Holy Spirit.”

only in so far as illuminated by his grace. He who ascribes to himself more understanding than this, is the blinder for not acknowledging his blindness.

22. It remains to consider the third branch of the knowledge of spiritual things—viz. the method of properly regulating the conduct. This is correctly termed the knowledge of the works of righteousness, a branch in which the human mind seems to have somewhat more discernment than in the former two, since an Apostle declares, “When the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meantime accusing or else excusing one another” (Rom. ii. 14, 15).

If the Gentiles have the righteousness of the law naturally engraven on their minds, we certainly cannot say that they are altogether blind as to the rule of life. Nothing, indeed, is more common, than for man to be sufficiently instructed in a right course of conduct by natural law, of which the Apostle here speaks. Let us consider, however, for what end this knowledge of the law was given to men. For from this it will forthwith appear how far it can conduct them in the way of reason and truth.

This is even plain from the words of Paul, if we attend to their arrangement. He had said a little before, that those who had sinned in the law will be judged by the law; and those who have sinned without the law will perish without the law. As it might seem unaccountable that the Gentiles should perish without any previous judgment, he immediately subjoins, that conscience served them instead of the law, and was therefore sufficient for their righteous condemnation.

The end of the natural law, therefore, is to render man inexcusable, and may be not improperly defined—the judgment of conscience distinguishing sufficiently between just and unjust,

“So indulgent is man toward himself, that, while doing evil, he always endeavours as much as he can to suppress the idea of sin.”

and by convicting men on their own testimony, depriving them of all pretext for ignorance. So indulgent is man toward himself, that, while doing evil, he always endeavours as much as he can to suppress the idea of sin. It was this, apparently, which induced Plato (in his Protagoras) to suppose that sins were committed only through ignorance. There might be some ground for this, if hypocrisy were so successful in hiding vice as to keep the conscience clear in the sight of God. But since the sinner, when trying to evade the judgment of good and evil implanted in him, is ever and anon dragged forward, and not permitted to wink so effectually as not to be compelled at times, whether he will or not, to open his eyes, it is false to say that he sins only through ignorance.

23. Themistius is more accurate in teaching (Paraphr. in Lib. iii. de Anima, cap. xlvi.), that the intellect is very seldom mistaken in the general definition or essence of the matter; but that deception begins as it advances farther—namely, when it descends to particulars. That homicide, putting the case in the abstract, is an evil, no man will deny; and yet one who is conspiring the death of his enemy deliberates on it as if the thing was good. The adulterer will condemn adultery in the abstract, and yet flatter himself while privately committing it.

The ignorance lies here; that man, when he comes to the particular, forgets the rule which he had laid down in the general case. Augustine treats most admirably on this subject in his exposition of the first verse of the fifty-seventh Psalm. The doctrine of Themistius, however, does not always hold true: for the turpitude of the crime sometimes presses so on the conscience, that the sinner does

not impose upon himself by a false semblance of good, but rushes into sin knowingly and willingly.

Hence the expression,—I see the better course, and approve it: I follow the worse (Medea of Ovid.). For this reason, Aristotle seems to me to have made a very shrewd distinction between incontinence and intemperance (Ethic Lib. vii. cap. iii.). Where incontinence (ακζασια) reigns, he says that through the passion (παθος) particular knowledge is suppressed: so that the individual sees not in his own misdeed the evil which he sees generally in similar cases; but when the passion is over, repentance immediately succeeds. Intemperance (ακολασια), again, is not extinguished or diminished by a sense of sin, but, on the contrary, persists in the evil choice which it has once made.

24. Moreover, when you hear of an universal judgment in man distinguishing between good and evil, you must not suppose that this judgment is, in every respect, sound and entire. For if the hearts of men are imbued with a sense of

justice and injustice, in order that they may have no pretext to allege ignorance, it is by no means necessary for this purpose that they should discern the truth in particular cases. It is even more than sufficient if they understand so far as to be unable to practise evasion without being convicted by their own conscience, and beginning even now to tremble at the judgment-seat of God.

Indeed, if we would test our reason by the Divine Law, which is a perfect standard of righteousness, we should find how blind it is in many respects. It certainly attains not to the principal heads in the First Table, such as, trust in God, the ascription to him of all praise in virtue and righteousness, the invocation of his name, and the true observance of His day of rest. Did ever any soul, under the guidance of natural sense, imagine that these and the like constitute the legitimate worship of God?

When profane men would worship God, how often soever they may be drawn off from their vain trifling, they constantly relapse into it. They admit, indeed, that sacrifices are not pleasing to God, unless accompanied with sincerity of mind; and by this they testify that they have some conception of spiritual worship, though they immediately pervert it by false devices: for it is impossible to persuade them that everything which the law enjoins on the subject is true. Shall I then extol the discernment of a mind which can neither acquire wisdom by itself, nor listen to advice?

As to the precepts of the Second Table, there is considerably more knowledge of them, inasmuch as they are more closely connected with the preservation of civil society. Even here, however, there is something defective. Every man of understanding deems it most absurd to submit to unjust and tyrannical domination, provided it can by any means be thrown off, and there is but one opinion among men, that it is the part of an abject and servile mind to bear it patiently, the part of an honourable and high-spirited mind to rise up against it. Indeed, the revenge of injuries is not regarded by philosophers as a vice. But the Lord condemning this too lofty spirit, prescribes to his people that patience which mankind deem infamous.

In regard to the general observance



The writings of John Calvin (1509–1564) established a solid foundation on which the spiritual descendants of this one man of God have been able to build a major portion of the Protestant Church. Among the revivalists who followed in Calvin's wake were Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), whose preaching provided the catalyst for the First Great Awakening, and Charles Finney (1792–1875), the single most important evangelist ministering during the Second Great Awakening. It should come as no surprise that Calvin's works will figure prominently as well in the Final Great Awakening.

“Our reason is exposed to so many forms of delusion, is liable to so many errors, stumbles on so many obstacles, is entangled by so many snares, that it is ever wandering from the right direction.”

of the law, concupiscence altogether escapes our animadversion. For the natural man cannot bear to recognise diseases in his lusts. The light of nature is stifled sooner than take the first step into this profound abyss. For, when philosophers class immoderate movements of the mind among vices, they mean those which break forth and manifest themselves in grosser forms. Depraved desires, in which the mind can quietly indulge, they regard as nothing (see *infra*, chap. viii. sect. 49).

25. As we have above animadverted on Plato’s error, in ascribing all sins to ignorance, so we must repudiate the opinion of those who hold that all sins proceed from preconceived pravity and malice. We know too well from experience how often we fall, even when our intention is good.

Our reason is exposed to so many forms of delusion, is liable to so many errors, stumbles on so many obstacles, is entangled by so many snares, that it is ever wandering from the right direction. Of how little value it is in the sight of God, in regard to all the parts of life, Paul shows, when he says, that we are not “sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves” (2 Cor. iii. 5). He is not speaking of the will or affection; he denies us the power of thinking aright how anything can be duly performed.

Is it indeed true that all thought, intelligence, discernment, and industry, are so defective, that, in the sight of the Lord, we cannot think or aim at anything that is right? To us, who can scarcely bear to part with acuteness of intellect (in our estimation a most precious endowment), it seems hard to admit this, whereas it is regarded as most just by the Holy Spirit, who “knoweth the thoughts of man that they are vanity” (Ps. xciv. 11), and distinctly declares, that “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. vi. 5; viii. 21). If everything which our mind conceives, meditates, plans, and resolves, is always evil, how can it ever

think of doing what is pleasing to God, to whom righteousness and holiness alone are acceptable?

It is thus plain that our mind, in what direction soever it turns, is miserably exposed to vanity. David was conscious of its weakness when he prayed, “Give me understanding, and I shall keep thy law” (Ps. cxix. 34). By desiring to obtain a new understanding, he intimates that his own was by no means sufficient. This he does not once only, but in one Psalm repeats the same prayer almost ten times, the repetition intimating how strong the necessity which urged him to pray.

What he thus asked for himself alone, Paul prays for the churches in general. “For this cause,” says he, “we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you might walk worthy of the Lord,” &c. (Col. i. 9, 10). Whenever he represents this as a blessing from God, we should remember that he at the same time testifies that it is not in the power of man.

Accordingly, Augustine, in speaking of this inability of human reason to understand the things of God, says, that he deems the grace of illumination not less necessary to the mind than the light of the sun to the eye (*August. de Peccat. Merit. et Remiss.* lib. ii. cap. v.). And, not content with this, he modifies his expression, adding, that we open our eyes to behold the light, whereas the mental eye remains shut, until it is opened by the Lord.

Nor does Scripture say that our

“It is thus plain that our mind, in what direction soever it turns, is miserably exposed to vanity.”

minds are illuminated in a single day, so as afterwards to see of themselves. The passage, which I lately quoted from the Apostle Paul, refers to continual progress and increase. David, too, expresses this distinctly in these words: “With my whole heart have I sought thee: O let me not wander from thy commandments” (Ps. cxix. 10). Though he had been regenerated, and so had made no ordinary progress in true piety, he confesses that he stood in need of direction every moment, in order that he might not decline from the knowledge with which he had been endued. Hence, he elsewhere prays for a renewal of a right spirit, which he had lost by his sin (Ps. li. 12). For that which God gave at first, while temporarily withdrawn, it is equally his province to restore.

26. **We must now examine the will, on which the question of freedom principally turns, the power of choice belonging to it rather than the intellect,** as we have already seen (*supra*, sect. 4). And, at the outset, to guard against its being thought that the doctrine taught by philosophers, and generally received—viz. that all things by natural instinct have a desire of good—is any proof of the rectitude of the human will—let us observe, that the power of free will is not to be considered in any of those desires which proceed more from instinct than mental deliberation.

Even the Schoolmen admit (*Thomas*, Part I., *Quæst.* 83, art. 3) that there is no act of free will, unless when reason looks at opposites. By this they mean, that the things desired must be such as may be made the object of choice, and that to pave the way for choice, deliberation must precede. And, undoubtedly, if you attend to what this natural desire of good in man is, you will find that it is common to him with the brutes. They, too, desire what is good; and when any semblance of good capable of moving the sense appears, they follow after it. Here, however, man does not, in accordance with the excellence of his immortal nature, rationally choose,

“The question of freedom, therefore, has nothing to do with the fact of man’s being led by natural instinct to desire good. The question is, Does man, after determining by right reason what is good, choose what he thus knows, and pursue what he thus chooses?”

and studiously pursue, what is truly for his good. He does not admit reason to his counsel, nor exert his intellect; but without reason, without counsel, follows the bent of his nature like the lower animals.

The question of freedom, therefore, has nothing to do with the fact of man’s being led by natural instinct to desire good. The question is, Does man, after determining by right reason what is good, choose what he thus knows, and pursue what he thus chooses? Lest any doubt should be entertained as to this, we must attend to the double misnomer. For this *appetite* is not properly a movement of the will, but natural inclination; and this *good* is not one of virtue or righteousness, but of condition —viz. that the individual may feel comfortable. In fine, how much soever man may desire to obtain what is good, he does not follow it. **There is no man who would not be pleased with eternal blessedness; and yet, without the impulse of the Spirit, no man aspires to it.**

Since, then, the natural desire of happiness in man no more proves the freedom of the will, than the tendency in metals and stones to attain the perfection of their nature, let us consider, in other respects, whether the will is so utterly vitiated and corrupted in every part as to produce nothing but evil, or whether it retains some portion uninjured, and productive of good desires.

27. Those who ascribe our willing effectually, to the primary grace of God (*supra*, sect. 6), seem conversely to insinuate that the soul has in itself a power of aspiring to good, though a power too feeble to rise to solid affection or active endeavour. There is no doubt that this opinion, adopted from Origen and certain of the ancient Fathers, has been generally embraced by the Schoolmen, who are wont to apply to man in his natural state (*in puris naturalibus*, as they express it) the following description of the apostle:—“For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but

what I hate, that do I.” “To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom. vii. 15, 18).

But, in this way, the whole scope of Paul’s discourse is inverted. He is speaking of the Christian struggle (touched on more briefly in the Epistle to the Galatians) which believers constantly experience from the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. But the spirit is not from nature, but from regeneration. That the apostle is speaking of the regenerate is apparent from this, that after saying, “in me dwells no good thing,” he immediately adds the explanation, “in my flesh.” Accordingly, he declares, “It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.”

What is the meaning of the correction, “in me (that is, in my flesh?)” It is just as if he had spoken in this way, No good thing dwells in me, of myself, for in my flesh nothing good can be found. Hence follows the species of excuse, It is not I myself that do evil, but sin that dwelleth in me. This applies to none but the regenerate, who, with the leading

“If the whole man is subject to the dominion of sin, surely the will, ... must be bound with the closest chains.”

powers of the soul, tend towards what is good. The whole is made plain by the conclusion, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind” (Rom. vii. 22, 23).

Who has this struggle in himself, save those who, regenerated by the Spirit of God, bear about with them the remains of the flesh? Accordingly, Augustine, who had at one time thought that the discourse related to the natural man (August. ad Bonifac. Lib. i. c. 10), after-

wards retracted his exposition as unsound and inconsistent. And, indeed, if we admit that men, without grace, have any motions to good, however feeble, what answer shall we give to the apostle, who declares that “we are incapable of thinking a good thought”? (2 Cor. iii. 5.)

What answer shall we give to the Lord, who declares, by Moses, that “every imagination of man’s heart is only evil continually”? (Gen. viii. 21.) Since the blunder has thus arisen from an erroneous view of a single passage, it seems unnecessary to dwell upon it. Let us rather give due weight to our Saviour’s words, “Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John viii. 34).

We are all sinners by nature, therefore we are held under the yoke of sin. But if the whole man is subject to the dominion of sin, surely the will, which is its principal seat, must be bound with the closest chains. And, indeed, if divine grace were preceded by any will of ours, Paul could not have said that “it is God which worketh in us both to will and to do” (Philip. ii. 13). Away, then, with all the absurd trifling which many have indulged in with regard to preparation. Although believers sometimes ask to have their heart trained to the obedience of the divine law, as David does in several passages (Ps. li. 12), it is to be observed, that even this longing in prayer is from God. This is apparent from the language used. When he prays, “Create in me a clean heart,” he certainly does not attribute the beginning of the creation to himself.

Let us therefore rather adopt the sentiment of Augustine, “God will prevent you in all things, but do you sometimes prevent his anger. How? Confess that you have all these things from God, that all the good you have is from him, all the evil from yourself” (August. De Verbis Apost. Serm. 10). Shortly after he says, “Of our own we have nothing but sin.” ■

Questions & Answers



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: *I realize you have said you intend to reserve discussion of current events for The Voice of Elijah Update. If you don't mind, however, I would like you to respond to a couple of quick questions for the benefit of those who have subscribed to this newsletter. The recent signing of the peace agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization—the PLO—has given a lot of people hope for lasting peace in that region. Since most conservative Christians believe the nation of Israel will play a major role in the events leading up to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, they have been watching these developments with intense interest. What is your perspective on these events in view of The Teaching?*

Elijah: I can only tell you what I believe will happen based on the information that has come to my attention in just the last 18 months.

Editor: *You're talking about the information you published in The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist?*

Elijah: That's part of it. But there are other things as well. Even things reported by the media over the past year and a half have contributed to my understanding. For example, to understand why the Israeli government would even consider "giving up" a part of "Greater Israel" in the face of vociferous opposition from orthodox Jews, you must understand the threat posed to the nation of Israel by the incredible spread of Islamic Fundamentalism over the past few years. In my opinion, the Israeli government signed the peace accord with the PLO as a

simple act of self-defense. They allied themselves with an old enemy in the face of an even more threatening new one—the Islamic Fundamentalists.

Editor: *How do Islamic Fundamentalists pose a threat to Israel?*

Elijah: They pose a threat not just to the nation of Israel, but to every secular Arab government in the Middle East. Within the next few years, unless I miss my guess, there is going to be an Islamic revolution in Egypt. That revolution will result in Egypt becoming an Islamic state along the lines of the Islamic government that came to power after the revolution in Iran. All the Arab governments face an Islamic revolution to one degree or another, but the threat Israel faces from Islamic Fundamentalism is total annihilation. I'm sure the current Israeli government felt they could more easily deal with the rage of orthodox Jews than with policing Islamic Fundamentalist Arabs living within their own borders.

You must understand that the Arab governments can freely do whatever they deem necessary to stifle the threat they face from Islamic Fundamentalists. They are doing that already through the brutal repression of their own Arab population. However, that option has not been available to the government of Israel in its attempts at controlling Islamic Fundamentalists living in the West Bank and Gaza because of the intense scrutiny of news reporters. Hence, government officials found they had few alternatives other than to turn the policing of those areas over to Arabs who can do what they have not been able to do—stop the spread of Islamic Fundamentalism. That is, in my view, exactly why they made common cause with the PLO.

If you have followed the news reports, you know the government of Israel has even made keeping the peace in the West Bank and Gaza a precondition to any further concessions on the issue of Palestinian independence. That means you can expect the PLO to use whatever means they find necessary to stem the tide of Islamic Fundamentalism in those areas. Believe me, that is exactly what they will do. That's because Islamic Fundamentalism poses just as much a threat to their government as it does to the nation of Israel and the Arab governments in the region. In the long run, however, I don't see the PLO being successful in stop-

ping the growth of Islamic Fundamentalism just because the economy in those areas is against them. But they will certainly give it a good try. Already we've seen the hat being passed around the world on behalf of the Palestinians, asking for donations from governments and corporations alike. There is no benevolence involved in the contributions made. Business and governmental leaders alike know that a basic key to stopping the growth of Islamic Fundamentalism is the provision of jobs and economic security to those Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza strip.

Editor: *What do you see happening in the area?*

Elijah: I expect things will continue more or less as they have all along. However, I expect the secular Arab governments to find greater common ground with the Jews in their fight against the spread of Islamic Fundamentalism. Nonetheless, I see five nations that will eventually fall to, or ally themselves with, Islamic Fundamentalism. Egypt, Libya, the Sudan, Jordan, and Lebanon are all slated to become, at least nominally, Islamic states. When the nation of Israel faces Islamic states to the North, East and South, however, you can expect the Antichrist to follow soon thereafter.

Editor: *Why so?*

Elijah: I'm just extrapolating from various prophetic texts in the Hebrew Scriptures that describe the activities of the Antichrist. I'd rather not go into all that right now. It's not tremendously important to your readers anyway. If an individual doesn't take the steps necessary to avoid Satan's delusion, what difference does it make if you tell them what will happen down the road? [Editor: He's alluding to 2 Thessalonians 2:10.]

Editor: *In making that remark you seem somehow disengaged. Why is that?*

Elijah: I've just spent two days—time that I didn't have to spare—adding two more components to the computer system I use in my work. I installed a CD-ROM drive to give me access to information distributed on compact disks and along with that I installed a new 1,200 dpi scanner to allow me to scan photographs. I had to spend the time installing and learning how to use those components because I need that equipment to prepare materials for the upcoming seminar, but I certainly didn't have the extra time to spare right now. Before doing that, however, I took a day to prepare for and record The Next Step tapes for those who are standing with you in that program. I may be "disengaged"—as you put

it—because the tapes that resulted from that recording session disappointed me.

Editor: *Why is that?*

Elijah: Well, first of all, it bothers me that I spent more time upgrading and learning how to use a computer system than I did preparing for and recording The Next Step tapes. Moreover, I had so many different things on my mind that I felt distracted during the recording session. I knew what I wanted to say. I even had a detailed outline prepared. Yet when I listened to the tapes afterward, I realized I did not sufficiently emphasize all the specific points I wanted to make concerning each of the scriptural passages I explained. I also realized that the lack of emphasis was because I had not written down the specific points I wanted to emphasize in each passage beforehand. The only thing I can say to your contributors in that program is I'll do better next time. But I already know that's going to be difficult.

When we're finished here, I have to begin editing the latest draft of *The Mystery of Scripture* so I can distribute it to The Next Step contributors for their comments and feedback. That's before I begin writing the article I intend to write for this newsletter. Then I have to finalize the materials for the seminar. The recording session for next month's tape falls right in the middle of preparing for that. So the same time constraints will exist then as did this month. My schedule has become much more grueling than I had ever anticipated it would be. I'm beginning to feel like I'm on a treadmill and can't get off. I can see light at the end of the tunnel, however. When *The Mystery of Scripture* is finally published, my stress level will go down considerably. But I have no idea when the other books I have planned will be published. If videotaping of seminars begins next year, that will add one more thing to a schedule that has all too quickly become unmanageable.

Editor: *You mentioned the upcoming seminar you are going to present for our Monthly Contributors. I know you have already prepared a detailed outline for that seminar because I've seen a copy of it. I'm also pleased that you have agreed to tape the seminar and to allow us to offer audio tapes of the seminar to all our subscribers. Would you mind telling us what the seminar will cover and why True Believers should know these things?*

Elijah: Sure. In this first seminar I intend to provide a survey of the biblical and extrabiblical evidence related to the different times Corporate Israel lost *The Teaching* and God's subsequent restoration of it. Then I want

to explain why reason is the only legitimate basis for faith. That information is crucial to all I intend to include in the books I plan to write.

The prevalent view in the Church today is that faith is some sort of nebulous essence that the pious provide through a mystical “leap of faith.” That is pure nonsense. Faith is nothing more than belief. We all believe a multitude of things about the world in which we live. And any belief without basis in reasonable evidence is stupidity—none more so than the Christian’s belief in the saving work of Jesus Christ. In an article I had planned to write for this newsletter, I intended to put the idiocy of viewing Christian conversion as some kind of “leap of faith” in historical perspective by disclosing the ridiculous philosophical source of that ignorant concept. Instead, I decided to expose your readers to the writings of a True Believer, John Calvin—a man who knew exactly what it *means* to be born again. I’ll put together an article refuting the “leap of faith” nonsense for the next issue.

I find the ignorance of conservative Christian leaders today sad but amusing when I hear them explaining how one must take the “leap of faith” to be saved. They have no idea what they are saying. They don’t know that particular lunacy came from a man who was not only a Pretender, he was also mentally ill. The only reason his goofiness found its way into the Church is because Pretenders around the turn of the century needed some way to reconcile their own warped view of ultimate reality with the biblical perspective. Consequently, they chose to seize on a madman’s distortion of the historical Christian view of faith rather than holding to *The Apostolic Teaching* that the Protestant Reformation had *restored* to the Church. I decided to include an excerpt from John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* in this issue because I thought his view of the “natural man’s” inability to grasp true reality would be a nice introduction to the article I’m going to write for the next issue concerning the idiocy that some “leap of faith” is necessary for one to be saved. John Calvin’s understanding of the Truth should also alert a few True Believers out there to the fact that they are currently listening to the preaching of a Pretender who has no idea what he is *talking about*.

I have no doubt some of your readers will discount John Calvin’s view of the natural man’s inability to perceive reality as it actually is. But that’s only because they, like most “Christians” today, aren’t interested in the Truth that was once a part of historic Christianity. Many of these people are not even aware that John Calvin and Martin Luther were the driving forces behind the Protestant Reformation. They are perfectly content in adhering to the social norms they

find in their local churches. That, in turn, is because most of them consider Christianity to be nothing more than a useful social vehicle for satisfying the lusts of their flesh. It provides them an opportunity to associate with like-minded individuals at regular intervals in an acceptable social setting where little is demanded of them except that they spout some well-known Christian cliché at the appropriate time

The charade of Pretenders doesn’t always end with their own personal pretense, however. The Pretenders in leadership positions in the Church also pretend that what they teach is what the Protestant Church has always taught. That is an outright lie! Some of their views are entirely their own concoction. Others are things they have heard taught who knows where. These people teach all sorts of things, but the one thing they don’t (or won’t) teach is that, in many ways conservative Protestant Christianity is exactly the opposite of what it was just a short 150 years ago. Yet, by and large, the teaching of conservative Christian leaders today reflects changes that were made in just the last century and a half. To contradict that simple fact is to spit in the face of the historical evidence.

The greatest danger True Believers face today lies in the fact that most don’t realize Protestant Christianity has, over the last 200 years, been gutted and hung out to dry. By that I mean the primary doctrines of historic Christianity that were restored during the Protestant Reformation have either been abandoned or completely distorted by various apostles of Satan over the years since John Calvin and Martin Luther so that today little essential Truth remains. Christianity has now become little more than an exercise in mysticism. There are a variety of reasons why that happened. We’ll look at some of the causes in future articles I’ll write for your publication. Eventually True Believers will come to understand that Satan’s inroads into the Protestant Church over the past five centuries disclose the maneuvering of an extremely devious personality who knew exactly where he was headed and what it would take for him to get there.

True Believers must realize and come to accept the fact that Christianity has changed dramatically under Satan’s unrelenting onslaught since the Protestant Reformers *restored* the basic outlines of *The Apostolic Teaching*. That change was led by extremely influential “apostles of Satan” like Søren Kierkegaard—the man who was directly responsible for the “leap of faith” nonsense. One of Kierkegaard’s favorite contentions was, “Truth is subjectivity.” What does that philosophical gibberish have to do with Jesus’ claim that He was the Truth? Nothing at all except that it has now, at long last, thrown open the front door of the Church to any fool

who feels like getting up and getting out early on Sunday morning so they can reel off some personal "subjective truth" during Sunday School.

The insidious nature of the current situation in the Church is that unconverted "Christians" have identified themselves with True Believers of the present and past generations as though they have been born again. These liars go about their charade every day, pretending they have the same mind-set as True Believers. There could hardly be a greater lie. These agents of Satan don't have a clue as to what True Believers like John Calvin were describing when they wrote concerning the regenerate life. How could they? They are nothing more than Satan's dupes. Ignorant pawns that they are, they have no basis for understanding the regenerate life because they have never experienced it. They are in fact so ignorant that they don't even know that they don't know; and they won't know until Jesus says to them, "Depart from Me, I never knew you."

Enough tirade. In the seminar I also intend to include a survey of some of the features of ancient Greek and Canaanite culture that are important to an understanding of the message of the Scriptures. I plan to conclude the seminar with a brief overview of some of the areas of research I am currently pursuing.

Editor: *Here's a follow-up question to the earlier one concerning the peace agreement between Israel and the PLO: I've heard you talk about the conflict in Bosnia, the coming civil war in Russia and the fact that neo-Nazi movements are going to introduce a new and violent side to the civil rights movement in our own country. Whenever anything like that is mentioned, you invariably say, "It's going to get worse." Why do you say that?*

Elijah: Violence is the watchword of our day. God destroyed this civilization with the Flood in the days of Noah because violence filled the Earth at that time. [Editor: Genesis 6:11, 13.] That's just one of the ways our own time is, as Jesus said, "like the days of Noah." [Editor: Matthew 24:37.] From statements made in the first two chapters of the Book of Habukkuk, I attribute increased violence today to specific demonic activity designed to achieve that end. The situation here in America has already gotten to the point where any sensible person living in an urban area is constantly on the lookout for the possibility of being hit by car-jackers, muggers or rapists any time they are out and about. That situation is going to get increasingly worse until the End. The United States has one of the strongest, if not the strongest, governments in the world. Yet even we

are not immune to the violence that is going to sweep the world before the Antichrist comes to power.

Consider this: The Russian Mafia is already a force to be reckoned with in Europe. Their brutal tactics are more formidable than anything the Italian mob has ever used. Now it seems the Russian mobsters have teamed up with the Italians in joint operations throughout the world. Yet the weakness of the Russian government makes it nearly impossible to touch the Russian Mafia. How do you suppose anyone is going to stop their advance into criminal activity in our own country? They aren't. And the potency of just that one source of violence is absolutely awesome. So I have no doubt violence is going to get worse here and anywhere else there is money to be made in crime.

Editor: *On another note: You used to include a column called "The Forecast" in the articles you submitted for publication. In it you talked about how parabolic imagery from The Teaching related to current events in a broader sense. Why did you discontinue that column? Can our readers expect to see it again any time soon?*

Elijah: I dropped that column temporarily from the April 1992 issue because I got involved in researching the articles I wrote for that issue. Then I didn't start it up again because it had sort of lost its purpose after you began publishing *The Voice of Elijah Update*. Who knows? I may bring it back when we get nearer the End. I suppose I could shorten the length and include it as a regular feature. Let me think about it.

Editor: *One final question: You told our Monthly Contributors last November in The Voice of Elijah Update that they could expect the outbreak of civil war in Georgia and Russia. Do you have any reaction to recent developments in Georgia and Yeltsin's faceoff with the Russian Parliament?*

Elijah: A bloodbath is coming to that part of the world, but it's anybody's guess as to when. The longer it takes to start, however, the more horrific it will be. I'm amazed at the blinders the media have placed on the eyes of the public here in our own country. Civil war is the order of the day throughout much of that area of the world already. Yet we aren't being told because the media doesn't understand the *significance* of what is already underway.

[Editor: The last question was asked shortly before publication, after Eduard Shevardnadze, the President of Georgia, was trapped during ethnic fighting in that country.] ■

Apostles' Creed

From Page 1

along propounding a different view. Then a new controversy would erupt, and depending on the outcome, Christian "orthodoxy" would either be preserved or redefined. More often than not, however, the parties to a controversy simply chose to maintain their "orthodox" views in separate camps.

If this cycle of redefining orthodoxy has been repeated over and over throughout the history of the Church (which it has), it doesn't take a genius to figure out that the various "Christian" churches, denominations and independent groups of today, with all their different "beliefs or practices or established doctrines," can't all be "orthodox." So, the question then becomes: Could anyone ever recover the true Christian orthodoxy of the first-generation Church?

We believe that question will be answered to the satisfaction of those interested in discovering the Truth if they will closely examine the evidence presented by The Elijah Project. *The Voice of Elijah* makes that information available in this newsletter and the other publications offered through this ministry as soon as it becomes available to us.

In addition to the information provided by The Elijah Project, however, in this issue we begin to offer our own analysis of evidence we have gleaned from Church history. This information is intended only to supplement the greater body of evidence presented by The Elijah Project, evidence that clearly shows the Early Church lost *The Apostolic Teaching* and that *The Teaching* is once again being restored. If that evidence is not convincing to you in its own right, evidence from Church history will add nothing.

In this column each quarter, we plan to offer an investigation into various persons and/or events in Christian Church history that have influenced the ongoing development of "orthodoxy" down through the centuries. By considering these things, the reader should eventually gain a greater understanding of the origins of the "beliefs or practices or established doctrines" the Church holds today.

In the end, we will find that much of what is accepted as orthodox in modern

Christianity is in fact of decidedly late and unorthodox origin. We will also find that what little orthodox doctrine remains in the Church today has far greater substance than we, or our teachers, ever imagined.

Another Definition

Webster's Dictionary adds another line to their definition of *orthodox*, a line that provides additional direction for this first offering of "HISTORY AND CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY." That line defines *orthodox* as "conforming to the Christian faith as formulated in the Early Church creeds." By that definition, anyone interested in determining whether something agrees with true orthodoxy should begin by examining the content and origins of those "Early Church creeds."

The most widely recognized Church creed, and the one accepted as a pronouncement of orthodox belief by Catholic and Protestant alike, is the Apostles' Creed. By its title, this creed would seem to have come to us from the days of the Apostles themselves. In fact, one segment of scholarship argues in defense of that proposition. However, another, larger group of scholars has shown how the Apostles' Creed evolved through a long series of events that led to repeated statements of faith over the first eight centuries of the Church.

Some of the scholarly discussion regarding the development of the Church creeds is concerned with determining the possible motivations for the creation of such creeds and the circumstances surrounding their development. By some, the Apostles' Creed is thought to be an outgrowth of an early Christian catechism for new converts. The Creed would thus have initially had an interrogatory form in the ritual of baptism, its purpose being to determine how well the new Christian had assimilated the doctrines of the Christian faith.

Other scholars maintain that the chief influence behind the formulation of the Apostles' Creed was the need for a *symbolum*, a verbal symbol or token, by which true adherents to the faith could be distinguished from those who followed heretical teachings. This view proposes that differing renditions of the Apostles' Creed exist today because it was not to be written down, but was to be memo-

rized and transmitted orally for recitation by the faithful.

The scholarly arguments concerning the factors that influenced the formulation of the Apostles' Creed are more complex and varied than those stated above. Rather than examining the lines of those arguments, however, our time can be better spent in the following overview. In it, we will give some of the more familiar forms of the Apostles' Creed and also outline the main issues regarding its origins.

(For a more complete exposition of the issues in scholarship regarding the content and origins of the Apostles' Creed, see *Early Christian Creeds*, by J.N.D. Kelly, David McKay Company, Inc.: New York, 1960. For a thorough presentation of all the major creeds of the Christian Church, see *The Creeds of Christendom*, by Philip Schaff, Baker Book House: Grand Rapids: reprint.)

The Received Text and the Old Roman Creed

The most commonly encountered form of the Apostles' Creed is the Received Text:

I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born from the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, descended to hell, the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty, thence He will come to judge the living and the dead; I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, and eternal life. Amen.
(Kelly, p. 369)

The earliest written version of the Received Text occurs in the work of a Benedictine monk named Priminus that dates to sometime between A.D. 710 and 724. It was included in a collection of Christian doctrine that was used for the instruction of Priminus' disciples:

"Thus we recall to your memories, brothers," he wrote, "the pact we made with

God in the baptism itself: that is, how, when we were severally asked by the priest our names and how we were called, either you yourself answered, if you were already of an age to answer, or at all events he who was undertaking the vow for you and lifted you up from the water answered and said, 'He is called John,' or some other name. And the priest inquired, 'John, do you renounce the devil and all his works and all his shows?' You replied, 'I renounce, that is, I despise and relinquish, all evil and diabolic works.' After that renunciation of the devil and all his works, you were also asked by the priest, 'Do you believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth?' You replied, 'I believe.' And again, 'Do you believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born from the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried, descended to hell, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, sat at the right hand of God the Father almighty, thence He will come to judge the living and the dead?' And you replied, 'I believe.' And the priest asked a third time, 'Do you also believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh, eternal life?' Either you or your god-father for you replied, 'I believe.'" (Kelly, p. 399)

As indicated by this text, this form of the Creed had already become firmly incorporated into the rite of baptism by the end of the eighth century.

[Note: The use of the Received Text in this way applies only to the Western Church—the Roman Catholic Church which was centered in Rome. The creed used by the Eastern Church—the Eastern Orthodox Church centered in Constantinople (modern Istanbul), was The Nicene Creed. (See the Comparative Table on pp. 20–22.) The reasons for the schism between these two branches of the Christian Church will be the subject of a later study.]

Because of its later association with the rites of baptism, many scholars believe the Apostles' Creed originated in Early Church baptismal rites. We'll see more evidence for this connection later in this article. (See the excerpt from Hippolytus'

"Apostolic Tradition" below.) However, the Received Text does not appear to have been transmitted verbatim from the time of the Apostles, as these scholars propose, but rather seems to have evolved from earlier, more concise forms.

This evolutionary development of the Apostles' Creed involved the addition of clauses like "creator of heaven and earth," "descended into hell," "catholic," and "the communion of the saints" to an earlier abbreviated form. That these clauses appear to be later additions can be seen by comparing the Received Text to earlier versions. For example, "creator of heaven and earth" and "descended into hell" can be found no earlier than in a version of the Creed recorded by Rufinus of Aquileja, A.D. 390. The addition of "catholic" to "the holy Church" is found in works by Nicetus of Remesiana, A.D. 450, and Eusebius Gallus, A.D. 550; and "the communion of the saints" is attributed to Eusebius Gallus.

The earlier form of the Apostles' Creed to which these later versions have most often been compared is the Old Roman Creed. This is the creed recorded by Rufinus of Rome around A.D. 390 (over 300 years before Priminus' version of the Received Text):

I believe in God the Father almighty; and in Christ Jesus His only Son, our Lord, Who was born from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, Who under Pontius Pilate was crucified and buried, on the third day rose again from the dead, ascended to heaven, sits at the right hand of the Father, whence He will come to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit, the holy Church, the remission of sins, the resurrection of the flesh. (Kelly, p. 102)

From Rufinus of Rome also comes the first written account of the legend concerning the Apostolic origin of the Creed. His account appears to have been handed down from an earlier tradition of unknown origin. According to the story, the Apostles formulated the Creed before their departure from Jerusalem in order to ensure the continuation of a single, unified Teaching in the Church:

As they were therefore on the point of taking leave of each other, they first

settled an agreed norm for their future preaching, so that they might not find themselves, widely separated as they would be, giving out different doctrines to the people they invited to believe in Christ. So they met together in one spot and, being filled with the Holy Spirit, compiled this brief token, as I have said, of their future preaching, each making the contribution he thought fit; and they decreed that it should be handed out as standard teaching to believers. (Kelly, pp. 1–2)

By the eighth century, the tradition Rufinus knew had taken on an elaborate form. Here is a rendition of the story as taken from a series of sermons falsely attributed to St. Augustine of Hippo:

On the tenth day after the Ascension, when the disciples were gathered together for the fear of the Jews, the Lord sent the promised Paraclete upon them. At His coming they were inflamed like red-hot iron and, being filled with the knowledge of all languages, they composed the creed. Peter said "I believe in God the Father almighty ... maker of heaven and earth." ... Andrew said "and in Jesus Christ His Son ... our only Lord" ... James said "Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit ... born from the Virgin Mary" ... John said "suffered under Pontius Pilate ... was crucified, dead and buried" ... Thomas said "descended to hell ... on the third day rose again from the dead" ... James said "ascended to heaven ... sits on the right hand of God the Father almighty" ... Philip said "thence He will come to judge the living and the dead" ... Bartholomew said "I believe in the Holy Spirit" ... Matthew said "the holy Catholic Church ... the communion of saints" ... Simon said "the remission of sins" ... Thaddaeus said "the resurrection of the flesh" ... Matthias said "eternal life." (Kelly, p. 3)

This account of the Apostles' Creed remarkably shows more resemblance to the Received Text than it does to the Old Roman. Its appearance at that time in history is actually quite remarkable, since the twelfth article, "eternal life," supposedly contributed by the Twelfth Apostle, had

not been a generally accepted tenet until then. This also makes a case for this particular version of the story having been formulated long after the Old Roman Creed, and definitely not by the Apostles themselves. Most scholars reject this legendary story regarding the origin of the Apostles' Creed as pure fiction. The more popular belief is that the Creed was drawn from an earlier tradition of Christian teaching known as "the rule of faith."

The Rule of Faith

Written references to "the rule of faith," which is also called "the faith," "the tradition," "the preaching" and "the rule," or "canon," "of the truth," have been traced to the late second and early third centuries. Although it is not known exactly what "the rule of faith" was, some scholars have purported it to be a fixed statement of faith similar to the Apostles' Creed. Others however, believe it was a designation used to denote a complete body of orthodox Christian teaching. The problem is scholarship seems unable to identify exactly what the content of that teaching may have been. The designation "rule of faith," et. al., is taken directly from the early authors of these texts.

The contexts in which creedal statements from "the rule of faith" can be found are varied. However, one setting is, like that of the Apostles' Creed, the rite of baptism. That can be seen clearly from an early third century account of the baptismal ceremony that comes from Hippolytus' (170–236 A.D.) "Apostolic Tradition."

[Editor: For a discussion of Hippolytus' influence on the Church of the fourth century, see "Poetry Ain't All Bad," *The Voice of Elijah Update*, February 1993. For more of Hippolytus' writings with commentary, see "That's Why He's Called AntiChrist!" *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1992, *The AntiChrist*, and/or *The Advent of Christ and AntiChrist*.]

When the person being baptized goes down into the water, he who baptizes him, putting his hand on him shall say: "Do you believe in God, the Father Almighty?" And the person being baptized shall say, "I believe." Then holding his hand on his head, he shall baptize him once. And then he shall say: "Do you be-

lieve in Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who was born by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was dead and buried, and rose again the third day, alive from the dead, and ascended into heaven, and sat at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead?" And when he says: "I believe," he is baptized again. And again he shall say: "Do you believe in the Holy Spirit, in the holy church, and the resurrection of the body?" The person being baptized shall say: "I believe," and then he is baptized a third time.

(Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity, T. Dowley, ed., Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, 1977, p. 115)

Another, earlier, reference to "the rule of faith" is that recorded by Tertullian (A.D. 145–220). He, too, placed creedal statements from "the rule" in the baptismal setting. However, he also made these statements in a declaratory sense, as a polemic against heresy. Consider the following excerpt from his work, "On Prescription Against Heretics":

The rule of faith is ... that rule by which we believe that there is one, and only one, God, and He the creator of the world, Who by His Word coming down in the beginning brought all things into being out of nothing; and that this Word, called His Son, appeared in manifold wise in the name of God to the patriarchs, made His voice heard always in the prophets, and last of all entered into the Virgin Mary by the spirit and power of God His Father, was made flesh in her womb and was born from her as Jesus Christ, thereafter proclaimed a new law and a new promise of the kingdom of heaven, wrought wondrous deeds, was nailed to the cross and rose again on the third day, was taken up to heaven and sat down at the Father's right hand, and sent in His place the power of the Holy Spirit to guide believers, and will come again in glory to take the saints into the enjoyment of life eternal and the celestial promises, and to condemn the impious to everlasting fire, both parties being raised from the dead and having their flesh restored.

(Kelly, p. 85)

Scholars have attributed one of the earliest written creedal passages to Irenæus. It can be found in his monumental work, "Against Heresies" (A.D. 170):

For the Church, ... has received from the Apostles and their disciples, handed down, its faith in one God the Father Almighty, Who made the heaven and the earth and the seas and all the things in them; and in one Christ Jesus the Son of God, Who was made flesh for our salvation; ... and the suffering, and the rising again from the dead, and the incarnate taking-up into the heavens of the beloved Christ Jesus our Lord, and His second coming from the heavens in the glory of the Father to sum up all things and to raise up all flesh of all humanity, so that ... He may make a just judgement among all men, sending into everlasting fire the spiritual powers of evil and the angels who transgressed and fell into rebellion, and the impious ... among men, but upon the just ... bestowing life and immortality and securing to them everlasting glory. (Kelly, p. 79)

Other Church Fathers who apparently referred to "the rule of faith" were Cyprian (A.D. 250), Novatian (A.D. 250), and even Origen (A.D. 230). [Editor: For a discussion of the perspective of Irenæus and Tertullian concerning Early Church teaching, see "Did You Mean That Literally?" *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1993. For a discussion of how Origen led the Church into error, see "The Origen of Folly" in the same issue.]

Early Fragments

The various versions of the Apostles' Creed and statements made concerning "the rule of faith" all seem to reflect the pattern of the Received Text. However, there are still earlier Christian writings that contain fragments from which the above statements could also have been derived.

The pattern that we see repeated in all of these creeds and creedal statements is trinitarian in nature; that is, they contain clauses that say something about each of the three Persons of the Trinity. The earliest author to record statements in this pattern is Justin Martyr. His writings predate Irenæus by 10 to 15 years. Here are a couple of short creedal state-

ments from his first “Apology:”

To the Father of the universe, through the name of His Son, and of the Holy Spirit; the Maker of all things, through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Spirit.
(Kelly, p. 71)

Another passage from this “Apology” follows the same trinitarian pattern but adds more description of the Son:

Thus we are not atheists, since we worship the creator of this universe ... and that we with good reason honour Him Who has taught us these things and was born for this purpose, Jesus Christ, Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, the governor of Judaea in the time of Tiberias Caesar, having learned that He is the Son of the true God and holding Him in the second rank, and the prophetic Spirit third in order, we shall

proceed to demonstrate.
(Kelly, p. 72)

From these statements, the pattern for the Apostles’ Creed is easily identified. In earlier writings the pattern is not as clear, but its basic components can still be recognized. Here is an excerpt from “The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians” that contains statements fundamental to “the rule of faith” as well as to the Apostles’

| The Apostles’ Creed (Rome) ca. A.D. 340 | Irenæus (Gaul) A.D. 170 | Tertullian (North Africa) A.D. 200 | Cyprian (Carthage) A.D. 250 |
|---|--|--|---|
| I believe | We believe | We believe | I believe |
| 1. in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; | 1. ... in one God the Father Almighty, who made heaven and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is; | 1. ... in one God, the Creator of the world, who produced all out of nothing ... | 1. in God the Father; |
| 2. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; | 2. And in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God [our Lord]; | 2. And in the Word, his Son, Jesus Christ; | 2. in his Son Christ; |
| 3. who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; | 3. Who became flesh [of the Virgin] for our salvation; | 3. Who through the Spirit and power of God the Father descended into the Virgin Mary, was made flesh in her womb, and born of her; | |
| 4. suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; | 4. and his suffering [under Pontius Pilate]; | 4. Was fixed on the cross [under Pontius Pilate], was dead and buried; | |
| 5. He descended into Hades; the third day he rose from the dead; | 5. and his rising from the dead; | 5. rose again the third day; | |
| 6. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; | 6. and his bodily assumption into heaven; | 6. was taken up into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father; | |
| 7. from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. | 7. and his coming from heaven in the glory of the Father to comprehend all things under one head, ... and to execute righteous judgement over all. | 7. He will come to judge the quick and the dead. | |
| 8. And I believe in the Holy Ghost; | 8. And in the Holy Ghost ... | 8. And in the Holy Ghost, the Paraclete, the Sanctifier, sent by Christ from the Father. | 8. in the Holy Ghost; |
| 9. the holy Catholic Church; the communion of the saints; | | | |
| 10. the forgiveness of sins; | | | 10. I believe in the forgiveness of sins, |
| 11. the resurrection of the body; | 11. And that Christ shall come from heaven to raise up all flesh, ... and to adjudge the impious and unjust ... to eternal fire, | 11. And that Christ will, after the restoration of the flesh, receive his saints | |
| 12. and the life everlasting. | 12. and to give to the just and holy immortality and eternal glory. | 12. into the enjoyment of eternal life and the promises of heaven, and judge the wicked with eternal fire. | 12. and eternal life through the holy Church. |

Creed (Polycarp is believed to have lived from A.D. 65 to about A.D. 155):

“Wherefore, girding up your loins,” “serve the Lord in fear and truth,” as those who have forsaken the vain, empty talk and error of the multitude, and “believed in Him who raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and gave Him glory,” and a throne at His right hand. To Him all things in heaven and earth

are subject. Him every spirit serves. He comes as the Judge of the living and the dead.

(The Epistle of Polycarp to the Phillipians, Chap. 2, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. I, A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1989, p. 33)

Consider also this excerpt from another Early Church Father, Ignatius (A.D. 30–107):

Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified, and [truly] died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead, His Father quickening Him, even as after the same manner

| Novatian (Rome) A.D. 250 | Origen (Alexandria) A.D. 230 | Gregory (Neo Cæsarea) A.D. 270 | Lucian (Antioch) A.D. 300 |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>We believe</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. in God the Father and Almighty Lord; 2. in the Son of God, Christ Jesus, our Lord God; 8. in the Holy Ghost (promised of old to the Church, and granted in the appointed and fitting time). | <p>[We believe in]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One God, who created and framed everything ... Who in the last days sent Lord; 2. Our Lord Jesus Christ ... born of the Father before all creation ... 3. born of the Virgin and the Holy Ghost ... made incarnate while remaining God ... 4. suffered in truth, died; 5. rose from the dead; 6. was taken up ... 8. the Holy Ghost, united in honor and dignity with the Father and the Son. | <p>[We believe in]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One God the Father; 2. one Lord, ... God of God, the image and likeness of the God-head, ... the Wisdom and Power which produces all creation, the true Son of the true Father ... 8. one Holy Ghost, ... the minister of sanctification, in whom is revealed God the Father, who is over all things and through all things, and God the Son, who is through all things—a perfect Trinity, not divided nor differing in glory, eternity, and sovereignty ... | <p>[We believe in]</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One God the Father Almighty, Maker and Provider of all things; 2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ his Son, begotten of the Father before all ages, God of God, Wisdom, Life, Light ... 3. who was born of a Virgin, according to the Scriptures, and became man ... 4. who suffered for us; 5. and rose for us on the third day; 6. and ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father; 7. and again is coming with glory and power, to judge the quick and the dead; 8. And in the Holy Ghost, given for consolation and sanctification and perfection to those who believe ... |

| The Apostles' Creed (Rome) ca. A.D. 340 | Eusebius (Caesarea, Pal.) A.D. 325 | Cyril (Jerusalem) A.D. 350 | Nicæno-Constantinopolitan Creed A.D. 325 and 381 |
|---|--|--|---|
| I believe | We believe | We believe | We [I] believe |
| 1. in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; | 1. in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of all things visible and invisible; | 1. in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; | 1. in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; |
| 2. And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord; | 2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, God of God, Light of Light, Life of Life, the only-begotten Son, the first-born of every creature, begotten of God the Father before all ages; by whom all things were made; | 2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages, very God, by whom all things were made; | 2. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; [God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made; |
| 3. who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary; | 3. who for our salvation was made flesh and lived among men; | 3. who was made flesh, and became man; | 3. who, for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost and [of, ex] the Virgin Mary, and was made man; |
| 4. suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; | 4. and suffered; | 4. was crucified, and was buried; | 4. He was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered, and was buried; |
| 5. He descended into Hades; the third day he rose from the dead; | 5. and rose on the third day; | 5. rose on the third day; | 5. and the third day he rose again, according to the Scriptures; |
| 6. He ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; | 6. and ascended to the Father; | 6. and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; | 6. and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father; |
| 7. from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. | 7. and will come again with glory, to judge the quick and the dead. | 7. and will come again in glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end; | 7. and he shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end; |
| 8. And I believe in the Holy Ghost; | 8. We believe also in the Holy Ghost. | 8. And in one Holy Ghost, the Advocate, who spake in the Prophets. | 8. And [I believe] in the Holy Ghost, the Lord, and Giver of life, Who proceedeth from the Father [and the Son, Filioque], who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, who spake by the Prophets. |
| 9. the holy Catholic Church; the communion of the saints; | | 9. And in one baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; | 9. And [I believe] in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church; |
| 10. the forgiveness of sins; | | 10. and in one holy Catholic Church; | 10. we [I] acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; |
| 11. the resurrection of the body; | | 11. and in the resurrection of the flesh; | 11. and we [I] look for the resurrection of the dead; |
| 12. and the life everlasting. | | 12. and in the life everlasting. | 12. and the life of the world to come. |

From the COMPARATIVE TABLE OF THE ANTE-NICENE RULES OF FAITH as related to The Apostles' Creed and The Nicene Creed.

His Father will so raise up us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.
(*The Epistle of Ignatius to the Trallians, Shorter Version, Chap. 9, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 1, p. 69–70*)

Polycarp and Ignatius both lived at the close of the Apostolic Era. If anyone could be said to have preserved any tradition handed down by the Apostles, they are the most likely candidates. Though they do not offer anything like the pattern we have seen in the quotations above, components of these early creedal statements are evident even in the works of these Early Church Fathers.

Of course our final appeal for an understanding of any tradition that might stand behind the Apostles' Creed should be made to the Apostles themselves. Once again, no declaration comparable to the complete Apostles' Creed can be found in the New Testament Scriptures. However, statements basic to the Creed appear in passages throughout the New Testament. These are just a few of the passages where such references occur:

And Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God."
(*Matthew 16:16*)

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.
(*Matthew 28:19–20*)

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.
(*Ephesians 4:4–6*)

And Peter said to them, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."
(*Acts 2:38*)

*And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness:
He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Beheld by angels,*

*Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in Glory.*
(*1 Timothy 3:16*)

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ...
(*2 Timothy 4:1*)

For Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, ... who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.
(*1 Peter 3:18–19, 22*)

By studying these and other passages from the New Testament Scriptures, the basic content of the Apostles' Creed again comes into focus. However, there is a much fuller meaning to the statements made in the Apostles' Creed that still remains unclear. For example, what was *The Apostolic Teaching* that was foundational to the doctrinal statements of the Creed? Based on the scanty evidence presented above, scholarship has little to go on that will produce any acceptable answers.

Actually, the amount of information in the Scriptures that is foundational to the statements of the Apostles' Creed is far greater than anything that is currently understood. That information ultimately encompasses the entirety of *The Teaching of Moses*. The basic concepts presented by The Elijah Project that have so far been made available through this ministry make that abundantly clear.

The Teaching Behind the Creed

Consider the following: If the loss of *The Apostolic Teaching* was foreseen by the Apostles themselves, how could the Church have maintained an understanding of that Teaching until the eighth century solely through the recitation of a creed? In the earliest years of the Church, *The Teaching of Jesus Christ*, known later as *The Apostolic Teaching*, was

taught without variation from congregation to congregation. (See "Plant 'em Six Feet Under," *The Voice of Elijah*, July 1993, for an explanation of the correlation between these two teachings.)

Since *The Apostolic Teaching* was the only teaching present in the Church at that time, it must also qualify as the only truly "orthodox" teaching. The Apostles themselves were alive to supervise the maintenance of doctrinal purity as can be seen from Paul's epistle to the Galatians, and they did all they could to ensure *The Teaching* would be handed down intact from one generation to the next. However, the Apostles knew false doctrine would eventually overtake the Church and contaminate the purity of *The Apostolic Teaching*. Peter said as much in his second epistle:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.
(*2 Peter 2:1*)

With that same view in mind, Paul warned the Ephesian elders of this most imminent danger during his last meeting with them:

Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.
(*Acts 20:28–30*)

Paul also gave similar instruction to his disciples Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3–7; 4:1–3; 6:3–5, 20–21; 2 Tim. 2:14–18; 3:1–7) and Titus (Titus 1:10–11).

Knowing full well that their efforts would ultimately prove to be in vain, these men of God nevertheless strove to preserve the purity of *The (orthodox) Apostolic Teaching* that had been entrusted to their care. Yet they met with only limited success even during their own lifetime, and over the century that followed their deaths the predictions of

Peter and Paul gradually came true. By the end of the second century A.D., the Church had lost all but the remnants of *The Apostolic Teaching*.

[Editor: See “Where Are Jesus’ Disciples?” *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1991; “The Protestant Confession: The Church Lost *The Teaching*,” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1992; and “Did You Mean That Literally?” and “The Origen of Folly,” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1993.]

In light of this loss of understanding, the diverse scholarly theories regarding the formulation of the Apostles’ Creed and regarding the content of “the rule of faith” should not overly concern us. Their ongoing discussions merely demonstrate that they have been unable to recover the essentials of *The Apostolic Teaching* that were lost. Consider this passage from the Book of Hebrews:

Therefore, leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of instruction about washings, and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement.
(Hebrews 6:1–2)

Obviously, for the individual in search of the Truth, this passage clearly indicates there was a much greater content to *The Apostolic Teaching* than what is taught in the Church today. Some of the “elementary” items outlined by the author of this epistle are at the very center of heated scholarly debate. So his survey of the rudiments of Christianity merely informs us scholarship has nothing to offer those who wish “to press on to maturity.” Therefore, one should understand from this general outline of the scholarly debate regarding the formulation of the Apostles’ Creed that there are other unanswered questions of far greater import:

What was the whole of *The Apostolic Teaching* that stands behind the outline in the Apostles’ Creed? Or what was the complete content of “the rule of faith” discussed by Irenæus, Tertullian and Hippolytus? Better yet, what did Polycarp and Ignatius hear from the mouths of the Apostles themselves?

Whatever the answer to these questions may prove to be, the information

currently available through scholarship shows us true orthodoxy has long since eluded the grasp of the best minds the Church has offered. We may have preserved the words of the early Christian creedal statements, but the source of these essential beliefs was lost long ago.

Looking Ahead

Of course, another question that may come to mind is: Why bother looking at all this “scholarship stuff” if scholarship has no understanding of true orthodoxy? That is a stance that many who want to return to the orthodoxy of the first-generation Church have taken, assuming that their ignorance will somehow result in a purer and “more vital” Christian experience. However, choosing to remain ignorant of Church history and the development of Christian doctrines will ensure but one thing: Those who take that stance will simply remain ignorant.

Keep in mind, the things you have read in this newsletter since the first issue in October 1990 have been derived from intense research into areas scholars have investigated for centuries. There is a tremendous amount of information available in what scholars have already uncovered, and although they may not understand the *significance* of what they are studying, the Truth concerning God’s intervention in history lies hidden there nonetheless.

So, what can you expect to find in subsequent articles in this column? Here are some interesting questions that come from a cursory examination of the table on pages 20–23 from Philip Schaff’s *Creeeds of Christendom* that places the various written references to “the rule of faith” next to the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed. Notice that one of the versions of “the rule” on page 21 comes from the pen of Origen.

That one is interesting. Origen is esteemed by many scholars as one of the greatest Christian theologians ever. Yet if his contribution to Christian orthodoxy is as dubious as we have read in earlier issues of this newsletter, perhaps other scholarly conclusions bear closer scrutiny as well. (See “The Origen of Folly,” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1993.)

For instance, Cyprian’s version of “the rule of faith” is also included in that table. He is hailed as one of the great leaders of the Roman Church in the middle of the third century. But did you know Cyprian advocated the reinstatement of so-called “believers” who had renounced Christ during the persecution by the Roman Emperor Decius? On the other hand, Novatian, a contemporary of Cyprian, is also recorded in Schaff’s table. He is held by some scholars to be a heretic. Do you know why? Because Novatian refused to allow those who denied Christ during the persecution of Decius to re-enter the Church. For that, he was condemned by Cyprian and other Christian leaders as a heretic.

Not only would it be interesting to know just what these two Church leaders taught, it would also be interesting to follow the path of orthodoxy through the third century. Maybe the notion that God loves everybody unconditionally and requires nothing of Believers originated further back than just 150 years ago.

Finally, notice the wording of the Nicene Creed in Schaff’s table. There is more detailed language in its description of the Son than what appears in the Apostles’ Creed. What is the statement “of one substance with the Father” supposed to *mean*? We can learn a lot about Church history just by looking into the circumstances around the formulation of that particular part of that creed.

Those are just some of the directions we might take in future articles in this column. Just remember that we are only going to be rummaging around in the history of the Church after *The Apostolic Teaching* was lost. We won’t be contributing anything to the restoration of *The Teaching* here. However, if you are convinced by the evidence you have found presented in the articles from The Elijah Project, this column should provide additional confirmation that what you have read in many of those articles is the *restored Teaching of the Apostles* that was lost so long ago. If you are not convinced of that fact, however, this column will only provide just so much more fodder for your Sunday school discussions. Until next time, you True Believers keep seeking an understanding of the Truth. ■