

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

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

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

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

Do you know anything at all about the Protestant Reformation? Philip of Hesse, Henry VIII and Frederick III the Wise? You know, the fuss that went on in Europe during the 1500s? The ruckus started by the likes of Luther, Calvin and Zwingli? They were called "Protestants" because they protested against some of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Their protest has been called a "re-formation" because they first set out to reform the Catholic Church from within. But actually, it should be called a "restoration" because their reform effort ended when they left the Catholic Church. At that point they established Protestant churches in which they sought to restore the doctrines

and practices the Church had held in an earlier time—doctrines and practices they contended the Roman Catholic Church had long since either lost or distorted.

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

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

The Protestant Church has been splitting up into splinter groups for nearly 500 years now because the Protestant Restoration has never ended. That's because some zealous new visionary has always come along trying to wake everybody up to the fact that the Church is not yet what God intended His Church to be. And the established Protestant churches have always had the same negative reaction to those new zealots as the Catholic Church had to Luther, Calvin

and Zwingli: "Out! Out! And good riddance! Just don't take anyone with you." So the zeal for a Protestant Restoration has continued all this time, long after the Protestant Reformation ended. And controversy has continued in its wake.

Did I mention zealous new visionaries trying to wake everybody up to the fact that something more needed to be restored to the Church? That's me. God called me to do it. To restore what the Church lost, I mean. I'm not going to start any new church group, so it doesn't matter much to me whether you wake up or not. I don't stand to gain anything. But I've got to do what I've got to do. God knows I wouldn't do it if I didn't have to. Maybe you didn't know it, but God doesn't take much lip from those He calls. So I'll be around awhile, doing what needs to be done. You may disagree with what I'm doing. If so, take the matter up with God. I'm not much interested in what anyone thinks, one way or the other.

Lest you think I'm some wild-eyed gnat in a hurricane, however, I thought I'd pass along a bit of historical information you might not have heard before. It occurred to me you ought to know that Protestants who try to discredit my restoration efforts are rejecting their own Protestant heritage—be it Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, etc. I don't mind Protestant folks disagreeing with what I teach. That's their God-given prerogative. It's the rejection of what I'm trying to do that doesn't ring true. After all, restoration of long lost Truth is a time-honored Protestant tradition. Maybe they don't know that. But I do, and being the orthodox Protestant that I am, I wouldn't want to break with that tradition now, would I?

## *Take a Look at This!*

First, let's talk a bit about the churches that came out of the Protestant Reformation. Perhaps you didn't know the various Lutheran churches of our day all have their origin in Germany, in the one man Martin Luther, the Father of the Protestant Reformation. The first-generation Lutherans believed Luther had restored lost Truth to their Protestant Church. The Lutheran Church has since that time ostensibly sought to maintain the Truth Martin Luther recovered, although most Lutherans today don't actually believe the same things Luther believed. That's the way it is with tradition, it

sometimes gets all twisted and distorted by those who come along later. But traditionalists don't care, they just like the fact that it's tradition. Maybe you didn't know tradition provides mental security for people who are too lazy to think for themselves. Now that wasn't very nice, was it? Oh well, too late. I've already written it down, and I don't like to edit.

The beliefs of the Reformed churches, on the other hand, originated in Switzerland, in the beliefs of the two men John Calvin and Huldreich Zwingli. You've probably heard of Calvin, perhaps not Zwingli. Both held similar views, but Calvin was the more prolific writer. Therefore, he has gotten the most credit. Both were influential in turning the formerly Catholic Switzerland into a Protestant state. They did so by claiming they were restoring biblical Truth that had been known to the Church in an earlier time. I say Calvin and Zwingli turned Switzerland from a Catholic state to a Protestant state because back then entire countries were either Catholic or Protestant. There was no separation of church and state as there is today. That came later. In the sixteenth century, the Church was the state and one became a citizen of the state through infant baptism.

That's where the Mennonites come in. They take their name from the one man Menno Simons (c. 1496–1561), who carried on the restoration efforts of Conrad Grebel (1498?–1526). Grebel split off from Zwingli to found the Anabaptist movement in 1525 because he rejected infant baptism and the church-state concept of the Reformed Church. He insisted instead that the true Church was a free church comprised only of those who joined through believer's baptism. Conrad Grebel's radical (at the time) concept of the separation of church and state later became a fundamental tenet of the Constitution of the United States. That contention and his insistence that the original Church knew only believer's baptism also provided the basis for all those "Baptist" churches and "Free" churches. Get it? "Baptist" churches believe in believers' baptism. Free churches believe the Church should be "free" from any state church.

The Presbyterian churches of today trace their origin back to Scotland and one man, John Knox (c. 1514–72). For the most part, these folks hold the same doctrines as the Reformed churches. That's because John Knox studied Calvinism in Switzerland. Their name, however, comes from the biblical term *presbyter*

("elder"). This group believed they had restored the true presbyterian form of government that existed in the Apostolic Church. Like all the other segments of Protestantism we have mentioned thus far, the Presbyterians have their roots directly in the restoration efforts of the first-generation Protestant Reformers. That is not the case with the Protestant churches established by those Reformers who carried on the restoration effort after them.

## *The Puritan Call for Restoration*

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

Henry got the son he wanted. But because of its less than auspicious beginnings, the English Reformation was at first a reformation more in name than in substance. The Catholic Church in Henry's realm merely changed its name to the Church of England, and things went on more or less as they had before, although to his credit Henry did curb some of the more extravagant abuses of the priesthood. Henry's religious expediency, however, created a lingering desire for a more complete restoration in the hearts of many of his subjects. That lingering desire to recover what the Catholic Church was thought to have lost eventually found its way to the New World, carried there by English colonists. Once there, it exploded into *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*. (That's the title of a book edited by Richard T. Hughes. See the Order Form at the back of this issue.)

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

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

Those in the Church of England who openly identified themselves with the call for an English Church based on personal spiritual commitment to God and an honest desire to see the long-lost Truth of the Apostolic Church restored were contemptuously referred to by the majority in the Church of England as "Puritans." In the words of one of their own, they sought "for the reform of Reformation itself" (John Milton). The spiritual life of the Puritans focused on the experience of the "new birth." Therefore, their movement has sometimes been likened to a revival, which in one sense it was. But it would be a mistake to view it only in that light.

The Puritans' objective was a continuation of the Protestant Reformation. They were not just concerned with spiritual revitalization, they wanted to restore the whole Truth of Scripture to the Church. However, different groups of Puritans had different ideas as to what that Truth was and how to accomplish its restoration. Many Puritan leaders, especially those educated at the University of Cambridge, had been heavily influenced by Calvinist theology as mediated to them through the Scottish Presbyterians. These leaders preferred to remain part of the Church of England so that they could work to restore the presbyterian form of church government from within. On the other hand, other Puritan leaders held views similar to the Anabaptist beliefs concerning separation of church and state. These believed the individual "congregation" was to be an independent body. Not surprisingly, the Puritans who believed this became known as "Congregationalists" or "Independents."

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

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

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

As the Puritan efforts at reformation dragged on, some Nonseparatists began to give up hope of ever reforming the Church of England. One such group set out for America to establish their own Independent church based on Congregational principles. In 1629 these Puritans established the Massachusetts Bay Colony and, although Independent, continued to claim affiliation with the Church of England. Needless to say they did so because the religious-political situation of their day was much more complex than can be explained here.

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

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

shaped the cultural mindset of what has since become the greatest nation on Earth?

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

## *The Massachusetts Bay Experiment*

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

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

*(Richard T. Hughes, The American Quest for the Primitive Church, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 26)*

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

*(Ibid, p. 27)*

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

*(Ibid, p. 29–30)*

These idealistic folk were soon forced to face reality in the New World. There is one simple but intransigent problem that all erstwhile Protestant Reformers have encountered in attempting to restore the Truth of Apostolic Christianity that the Church somehow lost along the way. It lies in the fact that not all people, when confronted by what one Reformer sees as an incontrovertible preponderance of evidence, will choose to be swayed by that evidence. These “unbelievers” have always posed a distinct problem for the restoration effort, especially when the Church was the state, as it was at Massachusetts Bay. Thus we find that before long, one extreme Separatist by the name of Roger Williams ran afoul of the Nonseparatists governing the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He did not agree that those colonists had taken the Reformation far enough. They had not “separated” the Church from the world. Therefore, he wanted them to continue their restoration effort. In his case, he apparently wanted what the Apostle Paul wanted—a church completely without “spot or wrinkle” (Eph. 5:27):

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

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

To their credit, however, the colonists at Massachusetts Bay didn’t execute their reform-minded nemesis as some earlier English rulers had done. They merely banished him from their colony, to live a life of isolation in the North American wilderness of the seventeenth century (1636). Just as an added footnote to this particular episode in the Protestants’ call for the continuation of the Reformation, in 1684 the English government forced the Massachusetts Bay colonists to abandon the church-state scheme they had initially established. That fact only serves to accent the exiled Williams’ charge against them:

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

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

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

What could the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony possibly have faulted in those four points? Very definitely the last. Their grand experiment was based on the church-state system of government. In adopting that concept they merely added fuel to the still-glowing English embers that remained alive from the raging fires of the Protestant Reformation. It would not be long before those banked coals roared to life again in the two Great Awakenings. When they did, however, the emphasis would not be so much on restoring church polity and theology. The stress would instead be on restoring individual and collective devotion to God.

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

toloc authority for gathering itself into congregations.

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

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

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

Williams established no separate denomination as did other Protestant zealots like Luther, Calvin or Knox because, except for the one time, he refused to gather believers into churches. It is therefore difficult to assess what impact he had on individual beliefs even in his own time. It is known, however, that he found many in both England and America who were willing to listen to him propound his views.

## *Methodists and the First Great Awakening*

The Methodist Church is the legacy left us by another of those ranting, raving Protestant Reformers. Not content to leave well enough alone, an English fellow named John Wesley (1703–1791) began preaching

hell-fire and damnation on the city streets of England just over a century after the colonists exiled Roger Williams for his pessimistic zealotry. The year was 1739. This time however, the Reformer was not so disinclined to assemble true believers. By the time of Wesley’s death (1791), there were over 72,000 Methodists in Great Britain and Ireland, along with more than 47,000 in the newly-independent United States of America.

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

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

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

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



Constantine. Therefore, he sought to take the restoration back to a time earlier than the beginning of the fourth century. Wesley even looked favorably on the heretical Montanists of the second century because he saw in them a Christian vitality he admired. Indications are he thought the Orthodox Church was somehow already going astray when it excluded the Montanist believers. Like Williams, Wesley also thought the Church had lost the apostolic authority the Catholic and Anglican Churches claimed. Not as pessimistic in his outlook however, Wesley took the true apostolic succession to be the continued apostolic witness of individual believers:

*He saw his revival as a providential corrective to the formalism and moralism of the national church; he sincerely believed that the Methodist gospel of grace ("repentance, faith and holiness") was a recovery of apostolic doctrine—still another reform of the Reformation.*  
(Ibid, p. 132–133)

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

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

There can also be little doubt that the Protestant Reformers' desire for restoration of the Church to the vitality it had once known found expression in the phenomenon that has since come to be known as the revival. I have already explained that the call for revival did not originate with John Wesley. He was merely echoing the Moravian Brethren who had been influenced by the writings of the German Pietist Johann Arndt (1555–1621). Arndt, in turn, had been influenced by pious Catholic writers before his time. (See "One Train. One Track. Two Rails." *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1992.) Wesley was somewhat unique, however, in that he blended the plea for personal commitment to God with the call for a restoration of the Church to the purity of a former Christian era. And Wesley was certainly not the last zealot to seek restoration through revival.

## *The Baptists and Disciples of Christ*

The preaching of John Wesley during the First Great Awakening, although foundational to the Methodist Church, reached Protestant believers of all stripe. But perhaps it reached none more effectively than the newly established Baptist churches in America. From a single congregation in 1608, the Baptists had expanded to forty-seven by 1644. By 1800, they had become the largest denomination in the United States. What were the reasons for the increase? There were various reasons. But one important factor was the spreading rings of influence emanating from the revivalist preaching of John Wesley and George Whitefield:

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

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

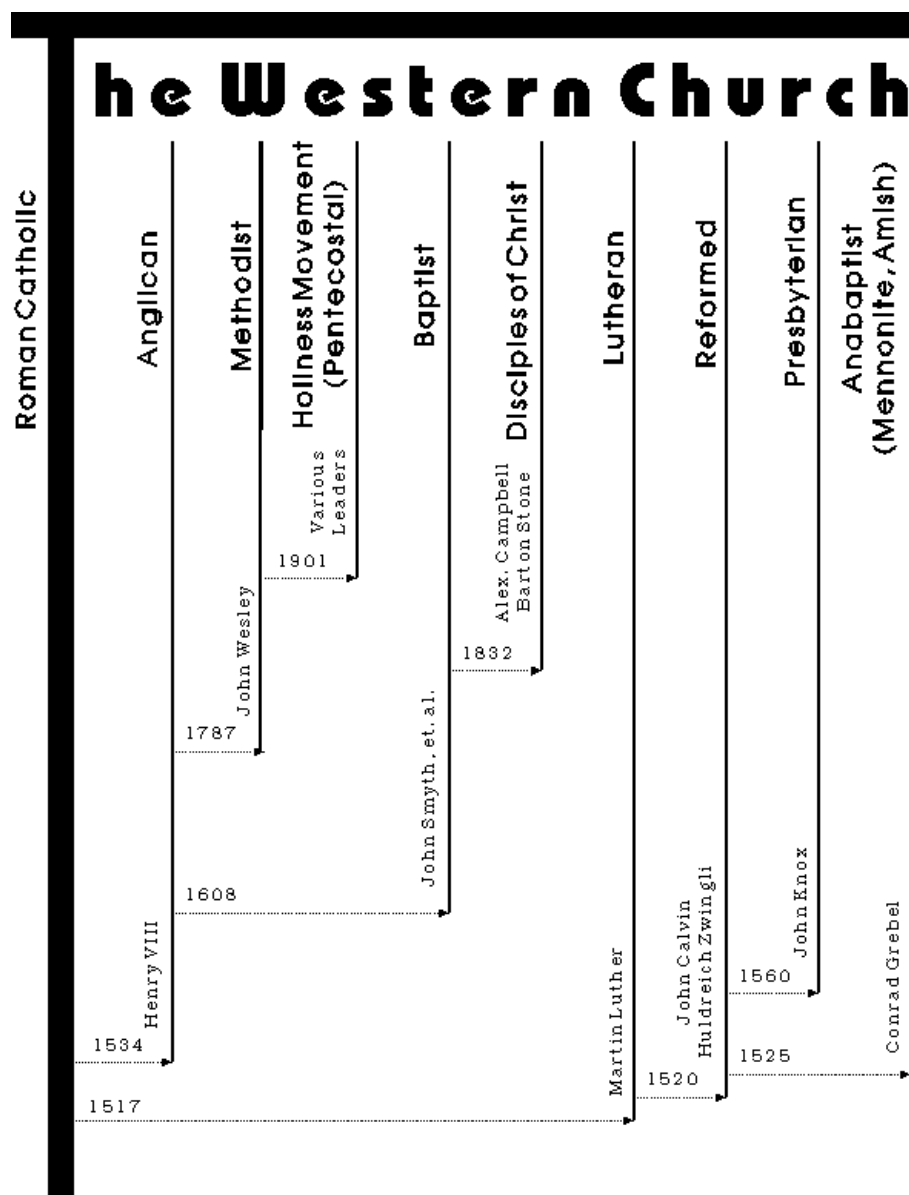
*At a time when the religious atmosphere of the country was being much influenced by the Second Great Awakening, many persons questing for a church life based on New Testament and early church patterns were drawn into the Baptist movement as it increasingly found its unity in the emphasis on biblical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

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

*As he sought to find a basis of uniting the various branches of Christendom by the restoration of primitive apostolic*

patterns, he adopted baptism of believers by immersion, and in 1813 his independent Brush Run Church joined the Redstone Baptist Association of Pennsylvania, ... He urged Baptists along with all other Christians to return

completely to New Testament patterns of church life with a minimum of organization. His influence spread rapidly as many Baptist congregations joined the ranks of the Reformers, but the two movements were on collision



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

Christ and—if they will even admit they are Christian—the Pentecostals.

That’s the trouble with people. When they don’t know *what* they don’t know, they don’t know *that* they don’t know. You know? The problem with the Western Church is another matter. If it weren’t filled with Pretenders, it would be a lot closer to being what God intended.

*courses, and by 1830 the churches under Campbell influence had largely withdrawn to become a principal element in the indigenous American denomination called the Disciples of Christ.*  
(*Ibid*, pp. 145–146)

And so it appears yet another Protestant denomination has its roots directly in the desire for restoration of the Early Church ideal. Did they find it? The Baptists didn't think so. And the Baptist search for that ideal did not end with the sudden withdrawal of Campbell and his followers. Among the varied Baptist groups, associations and denominations in existence today are many that claim to have at least partially attained the Early Church ideal over the past 150 years. The Primitive Baptists, for example:

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

Some Baptists even came to claim they never lost anything. Beginning in 1851, a Baptist pastor and writer named J.R. Graves began propounding the view that the only true Christian churches were those Baptist churches in succession to the apostolic churches of the first century. His argument in that regard revolved around the Baptist claim of lineal descent from the martyrs of those primitive churches as well as to the protection and preservation of the true Gospel message. This "Old Landmark" movement eventually resulted in the formation of the American Baptist Association in 1924. The Old Baptist Union headquartered in London also claims to have somehow achieved the ideal:

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

Beyond those Baptists who explicitly lay claim to have fully recovered or never lost the ideal, however,

lie all the other Baptist groups, associations and denominations. Many of these have probably long since forgotten their original charter was established by someone who intended to restore what he believed the Church had lost.

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

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

## *The Pentecostals*

Toward the end of last century, while some Baptists were deciding they had never lost anything, other Baptists, confident they had already recovered what was lost, were finding their calling in missionary activity around the world. During that same period, however, the still-burning desire for restoration was taking a slightly different turn among those Protestants who were not yet convinced any Protestant group had stumbled on to the ideal.

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

Meeting annually in summer camp meetings, these Holiness folk sought the restoration of the Church to its former glory through the sovereign inner working of God's Holy Spirit. They believed firmly in

Wesley's second definite work of grace, an experience different from and other than the new birth, and pursued the apostolic ideal through personal holiness. Over time, some in the Holiness Movement came to identify Wesley's second definite work of grace as the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit." Believing there was such an experience, however, they still could not answer the question concerning how one could be certain they had received the "baptism." However, that situation changed shortly after the turn of the twentieth century.

In the winter of 1901, several students at a Holiness Bible School in Topeka, Kansas determined that the gift of speaking in tongues was the visible outward sign of the inward work they called the "Baptism of the Holy Spirit." The rest is history. The past century has seen Pentecostal revival sweep the world. In many areas around the world Pentecostals have been, and continue to be, the fastest growing segment of Protestantism.

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

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

## *The Fundamentalists*

In order to understand the beliefs and activities of most conservative Protestants today, you must first understand how the fundamentalist controversy that occurred at the beginning of this century has served to shape their theology and world view. That information

is important to an accurate understanding of why they are now becoming involved in social and political issues rather than seeking God through revival as they did in the past. You see, the Fundamentalists are still carrying on the Protestant restoration effort, but they have put a slightly different twist on that endeavor. Since their viewpoint is pervasive in the conservative Protestant Church today, let's take a look.

As we have just seen, the Holiness Movement continued the search for what some Protestants sincerely believed the Church had lost and other Protestants had not yet restored. Some of these folks ended up as Pentecostals when they came to believe their search for the Primitive Church was over. Others in the Holiness Movement, however, when faced with the issue of speaking in tongues as the sign of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, suddenly decided they should look elsewhere to find what they were seeking. Consequently, right after the turn of the century, these Holiness believers began to join with conservative believers from the mainline Protestant denominations in what has since become known as the "Fundamentalist Movement."

The Fundamentalist Movement was started by conservative Protestants—primarily those in the Baptist and Presbyterian denominations—who became convinced the Protestant Church faced the distinct possibility of losing valid theological doctrines which had been restored during the Protestant Reformation. Therefore, as George Marsden has shown in his book *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, conservative Protestants in various denominations began drawing closer together in their common battle against encroaching modern liberalism. These conservatives became known as "Fundamentalists" because they believed certain basic Protestant doctrines were "fundamental" Christian doctrines. (Marsden's book is listed on the Order Form.)

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

contention has always been the tongues experience/doctrine the Pentecostals claim to have restored.

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

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

The battles Fundamentalists fought against liberal teaching shortly after the turn of last century have had a profound impact on all Protestants, Liberals and Conservatives alike. Those battles began the shaping of the conservative Protestant mind-set into what it is today. Fundamentalists from the Holiness Movement made an important contribution to that movement. Therefore, it is important that True Believers understand what happened at that time. I encourage you to read Marsden’s book as a good beginning. What I present now is my own analysis from the perspective of how those battles have served to alter the focus of the Protestant restoration effort.

## Conservative Christians Today

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

When Charles Darwin published his *Origin of Species* in 1859, however, he unleashed an avalanche of publications written by liberal theologians that challenged this foundational tenet of the Protestant religion—the authority of Scripture. Therefore, the theory of evolution was no minor thing to those Protestant believers who based their hopes on this “fundamental” Protestant doctrine. Their Protestant forebearers had firmly believed that tenet of the Faith, and they were not about to give it up easily. If the Bible could be shown to be faulty, how could it be the revelation on which their beliefs were based?

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

The only Protestants still out there seeking to find something more at the turn of the century were those in the Holiness Movement. Their search ended abruptly when the Pentecostal wing of the Holiness Movement came to the conclusion they had restored the doctrine related to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The Pentecostals immediately stopped seeking to restore anything more. They turned instead to proclaiming they had finally found the Holy Grail. Those in the Holiness Movement who weren’t convinced by the Pentecostals’ new-found “sign” pulled back into defensive positions and joined the Fundamentalist Movement in its fight to defend the authority of Scripture.

As a result of the simultaneous occurrence of the fundamentalist controversy and the Pentecostal revivals, the vibrant ongoing Protestant search for what the Church had lost came to an abrupt end. Oh, sure, you still can find pockets of individuals who have taken up the search for the Christian ideal. They have done so because they have heard talk about the possibility of finding something more. But, for the most part, the once widespread Protestant belief that something more needed to be restored has long since faded.

Over the past eighty years, conservative Protestant churches have changed dramatically.

Instead of the desire for a sovereign move of the Holy Spirit like that experienced in the fires of earlier Protestant revivals, there is now only the talk of "church renewal." These people are seeking to restore what the Church had in an earlier time, but that earlier time is no longer the time of the Apostles. It is instead a time in the not so distant past, when Protestant Christians supposedly had more spiritual vitality. What's going on here?

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

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

But always in the past, when one group decided they had restored the ideal, another group remained unconvinced. Not believing that all had been restored, these seekers provided continued impetus for the ongoing restoration effort. There are some like that today among the Pentecostals. But due to the pietist/mystical legacy the Pentecostals inherited from their Holiness founders, they have no clear idea where to look for that something more. Most are looking for it in some subjective experience instead of in the objective revelation of the Scriptures as the Reformers before them did.

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

form of expression in the 1950s and 1960s when the Evangelical wing of Protestant Fundamentalism began pushing for a "revival of evangelical Christianity." Notice they were no longer seeking to restore what the Catholic Church had lost. They were now seeking to restore what the Protestant Church had lost.

By the late 1980s, the restoration zeal of the Fundamentalists had found expression in the patriotic call to "bring America back to God." The ultimate fundamentalist solution to the problems presented by the Theory of Evolution is incredibly simple, and also incredibly naïve: Let's use politics to take America back a century or so, to a much different time when everybody accepted the authority of Scripture and believed there was a God.

Obviously, the restoration of America to God isn't going to happen any time soon. Probably never will. Yet the avid heirs of Fundamentalism carry on with the zeal typical of all Protestant Reformers before them, unaware that their predecessors' zeal for the restoration of the Protestant ideal lost its focus some 90 years ago. They should be spending their time trying to restore what the Church lost in an earlier age. Instead, they are trying to restore something America never had. Such are the devious tactics Satan uses to deceive.

## *Conclusion*

If you did not find your own Protestant denomination or association mentioned in this article, it was not omitted intentionally. I could have included many more Christian organizations than I have. But I only included those necessary to illustrate my point: All Protestants stem from the original belief that the Church lost something important. For example, the founder of the Amish system of beliefs was a Mennonite bishop named Jacob Amman. His group split off from the Mennonites in the late seventeenth century, thinking they had restored some greater Truth of Scripture on the basis of literal interpretation of the Scriptures. By contrast, the Nazarene churches are of more recent origin (1908), having a Methodist/Holiness line of descent until they formed their own separate organization. Unfortunately, some (not all) of the splinter groups and sects that have come into existence over the past century are more the result of bad habits learned than of a sincere desire to find *The Way* back to God's pure Church.

So, what do you think? Did the Catholic Church actually lose some crucial doctrine or practice? We Protestants say it did. If you think not, you must be either Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox. You certainly can't be a Protestant, for that is the very *raison d'être* of the Protestant Churches. Now that I think about it, I suppose you could be a Protestant, it just wouldn't be logical, that's all. But I guess there isn't any rule that says everybody has to be logical.

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

Now that we've dropped the naysayers, I venture to suggest—with the current state of the Protestant Church providing mute testimony—that none among us are yet the special people God would have His Church be. I say that in spite of the fact that some of our more boisterous fellow-Protestants seem to think the post-rapture party has already begun (as if they were going to be there). For you good Protestants reading this who, like me, can't honestly say you see any around us who have yet attained the Early Church ideal, I encourage you to consider your options. If the Church did indeed lose something—as Protestants have continued to insist for well over four hundred years—we must be in quite a pickle.

Now I'm not all that naïve. I know most Protestants are quite content to assume their denomination, group or association has already restored all that needs to be restored. Actually, most of them have no idea what it means to be a Christian, much less that someone before them ever claimed to have recaptured the Protestant equivalent of the Holy Grail. They were just born Protestant—Lutheran, Presbyterian, Baptist, etc.—and never got around to looking into their roots. But you? Surely you've got more on the ball than those folks! So, what do you think? Have you arrived, or are you still searching? If you're still searching, you may be interested in what I have to say. So let me tell you what I'm all about.

First, there is the matter of what was lost. Just as the Protestant Reformers deduced was true, the Church did lose something, a certain something special called *The Apostolic Teaching*. The Church lost that right around A.D. 200, at about the same time that two Christian leaders who knew and believed *The Apostolic Teaching*—Tertullian and Hippolytus—left the Orthodox Church. More than any other Protestant Reformer, John Wesley came closest to the Truth as to when the Church lost what it once had. He was also probably close in his assessment of the Montanist Christians. I haven't yet looked into the matter, but they may well have been forced out of the Orthodox Church because their views became unacceptable after the second-century Church took a slight turn to the right. Tertullian—one of the great theologians of the late second century—seemed to think they were preferable to the Orthodox Church of his day. He quit the Church in 207 and became a Montanist, in part because he disagreed with the readmission of Pretenders who had denied Christ during persecution. (See "Puritans and Pretenders: Cyprian, Novatian, and the Lapsed," *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1994.)

Second, there is the matter of the appropriate method one should use in recovering what the Church lost. Once *The Apostolic Teaching* was lost, speculation concerning the *meaning* of Scripture became the norm. But speculation could never replace the revelation of *The Apostolic Teaching* Jesus Christ had given the Apostles. That could only be regained if He gave *The Teaching* again by revelation. Consequently, nobody since the time of Tertullian and Hippolytus has been able to find *The Way* back to the purity of the Truth of the Old Testament Gospel message concerning Jesus Christ that was known to the early Christians.

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

Third, there is the matter of identifying what has been lost. You see, *The Apostolic Teaching* has a specific

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

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

You see, God called me to do what all those good Protestant Reformers before me knew needed to be done but couldn't do because it wasn't the right time. Why wasn't it the right time? Because everything remained in the hands of God. Remember I told you *The Apostolic Teaching* could only be regained if Jesus Christ gave it to someone again by revelation? Well, now that the time of the End has come, revelation is no longer necessary. If you want to know why, I invite you to read "Did Jesus Leave a Will?" *The Voice of Elijah*, July 1991. Now that the Good Lord has done what needs to be done so that revelation is no longer necessary for us to regain what was lost, He has called me to restore *The Apostolic Teaching*. Do you know why? Because the Return of Jesus Christ is just around the corner. That's another ridiculous notion, isn't it? (Better shovel faster, boys. It's getting pretty deep.)

I've been called to show you *The Way* back so that you can be ready when Jesus Christ returns. Does that sound strange to you? If it does, just remember this: There are lots of Christian ministers out there preaching to you. If God didn't call them to do exactly what they're doing, why are they doing it? I'm not claiming anything more than what they claim: God called me to do what I'm doing. I assume they believe He did the

same for them. If they don't or He didn't, I wouldn't want to be in their shoes on Judgment Day!

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

So, you see. I'm not so radical after all, am I? I'm just doing what lots of other Protestants before me have done. I'm also doing what all those Christian leaders today claim to be doing—I'm doing what God called me to do. And the proof of my calling will be, as they say, "in the pudding." So if it doesn't taste right to you, nobody says you have to eat it. But you really should consider the following logic:

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

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