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Commentary — From the Margins

Radical Reform

The Reformers aimed to reform the old Church by the Bible; the Radicals attempted to build a new Church from the Bible. The former maintained the historic continuity; the latter went directly to the apostolic age, and ignored the intervening centuries as an apostasy. (*History of the Christian Church*, Volume VIII: “Modern Christianity. The Swiss Reformation”)

No better statements can be made about what is today occurring within greater Christianity than the above citation. Historical exegesis maintains theological continuity back to the Council of Nicea (ca 325 CE), when Constantine, the unconverted Roman Emperor, determined what would be sound doctrine for the Church. Errors introduced into the teachings of the Church in the 2nd, 3rd, or 4th Centuries have been continued through elevation of the traditions of men to the status of Holy Writ. These long held errors, embodied in the sentiment behind the lyrics of “Give Me That Old Time Religion,” will cause many born-from-above saints to rebel against God when the lawless one is revealed (2 Thess 2:3). These many rebelling saints, in denominations coming from Protestant reform of *the old Church by the Bible* and from in-house reform of *the old Church*, will use historical exegesis to support arguments for practices and dogma developed within the old Church long before any reform occurred. These arguments will cause saints to attempt entering God’s rest on the following day, when no covering for sin exists but obedience. The rebels will not accept any teaching that has them naked before God. They will cover themselves with fig leaves and insist that they are fully clothed—and God will, then, send a great delusion over the rebels so that they cannot repent (vv. 11-12). The rebels will be absolutely convinced that they alone represent the true Church, possessing the faith once delivered, and they will persecute endtime Radicals that have built a new Church from the Bible.

The construction of a new Church from the Bible was anticipated by the prophet Malachi: “Behold, I [God] will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes” (4:5). Jesus’ disciples asked about this Elijah, and Jesus said, “Elijah does come, and he will restore all things. But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands” (Matt 17:11-12). Jesus’ disciples understood that He was speaking of John the Baptist. But it isn’t John the Baptist that comes *before the great and awesome day of the Lord*. Jesus the Christ, from the heavenly realm, will complete the work to be done in the seventieth prophetic week when the Son of Man is revealed. He is the Elijah to come who will turn fathers to children, and children to fathers. He placed Himself in His answer to His disciples about Elijah. Therefore, the glorified Jesus, working through disciples, *will restore all things before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes*.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ...that day will not come, unless the rebellion [great falling away] comes first” (2

Thess 2:1, 3). Thus, when the Elijah to come attempts to purify the old Church and her many protesting daughters shortly before the awesome day of the Lord comes, a great rebellion or falling away occurs. Although these passages have been previously coupled together by reformers and radicals when combatting the Roman State Church and popery, the lawless one [man of perdition] proclaiming himself to be god is Jesus' endtime abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet (Matt 24:15). And this abomination of desolation declares himself to be god 1290 days before the coming of Christ (Dan 12:11). These are actual days, not years. Whereas the ascension of the Roman Church and popery to political power can be a type of the endtime abomination of desolation, especially when considering the abuses of popery twelve and thirteen centuries ago (the application of a day for a year principle), the reality of this great rebellion against God occurs shortly before the coming of Christ, not when God sent the Church into Babylonian captivity.

When the Son of Man is revealed, the greater Church as the Body of Christ will be seen for what it is: a collection of lazy rebels who do not love the truth enough to have practiced walking uprightly before God when cloaked with Christ' righteousness. Instead of them having practiced walking upright, they remain spiritual infants, spoiled, with soiled diapers, satisfied with Jesus doing everything for them, with Him waiting on them hand and foot. Few of them will even wash one another's feet. So when the cloak of Grace is cast aside following the liberation of the Church from bondage to sin, these rebels will behave as the nation that left Egypt behaved. They will believe the evil report of the ten witnesses who say that obedience to God is a giant that cannot be defeated, that keeping the commandments is impossible even though they have been empowered by the Holy Spirit, thereby enabling their mind and hearts to rule over their flesh. They will, then, commit blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will not be forgiven them. Rather, God will send a great delusion over them so that they cannot repent. And few of them will believe a word of this now, or then. They will not believe until they are cast into the lake of fire.

As a physical decree went out to rebuild the temple of God in physical Jerusalem, a spiritual decree went out to rebuild the temple of God in the Jerusalem above. Both Reformers and Radicals heard this decree. Reformers wanted to rebuild temples where they were in Babylon; they did not want to journey to spiritual Judea. After all, physical Israel had prospered in Babylon. What need was there to journey to the land Beyond the River? Why not stay where the nation was? But Radicals set out for spiritual Judea.

As if the journey to Judea were a sprint race, Swiss Radicals accepted the New Testament as their only rule of faith and practice, broke with Catholic tradition, and rejected Luther's theory of forensic, solididian justification, and the real presence. They believed it was possible to keep the law and to reach perfection. Hätzer and Denck doubted the doctrine of a triune deity. Some Radicals believed in the sleep of the soul between death and resurrection, a millennial reign of Christ, and final restoration. But the burning question was baptism: Radicals could not find infant baptism in the Bible, so they denounced it as an invention of popery. Baptism, they reasoned, presupposes instruction, faith, and conversion, which is impossible in the case of infants. (*History of the Christian Church*, Volume VIII: "Modern Christianity. The Swiss Reformation")

If adult baptism is necessary, then centuries of infant baptism produced a spiritual condition analogous to Jerusalem being abandoned for seventy years after Nebuchadnezzar sacked the city a second time. The Radicals, known in history as Anabaptists, taught that the voluntarily baptism of responsible persons was the only legitimate baptism. The implication of this teaching was that virtually the entirety of Christianity consisted of unsaved individuals. The Jerusalem above was as empty of spiritually circumcised Israelites as physical Jerusalem had been of physically circumcised Israelites. And they were correct. Baptism is the voluntary putting to death of the old self, thereby allowing judgment to come upon the born-from-above son of God that is a member of the household of God. Death precedes judgment (Heb 9:27), and judgment is today on the household of God (1 Pet 4:17). Physical circumcision occurred on the eighth day. A Hebrew infant lived a week before being circumcised. But a spiritual week is not linked to the passing of time. For most of humanity, this week equates to the individual's natural lifetime. Judgment will occur in the great White Throne Judgment, when the person is resurrected from death by the Breath of God [*Pneuma 'Agion*]. The person will then be spiritually circumcised. But being born-from-above, or born anew into the still breathing fleshly tabernacle of the old self produces spiritual circumcision, thereby making this earthenware vessel holy and set apart for special use. This person must now put the old self to death by baptism. Otherwise, the old self will continue to rule the fleshly tabernacle into which the infant son of God was born, and upon which judgment has come.

"The demand of rebaptism virtually unbaptized and unchristianized the entire Christian world, and completed the rupture with the historic Church. It cut the last cord of union of the present with the past" (*History*— Vol VIII).

For the past century, the Churches of God have sought to trace the history of the true Church through Sabbath observance. Thus, since the gates of hell will not prevail against the Church (usually interpreted to mean that the Church will not die out), they assigned Sabbath observance to factions that kept the eighth day, and identified communities of crypto-Jews as factions of the true Church. The conversion of these crypto-Jews might or might not have been genuine, but it isn't by Sabbath observance that the true Church can be traced. All who have the Holy Spirit form the true Church, regardless of whether these born anew disciples observed the seventh day or the eighth day as the Sabbath. (Sunday observance is merely one additional sin that Christ has to bear for the disciple that doesn't know better.) Rather, it is through tracing the sacrament of baptism that history of the Church mirrors the history of the physically circumcised holy nation.

The physically circumcised nation of Israel didn't die out in Babylon, but thrived and prospered. Likewise, the spiritually circumcised nation of Israel hasn't died out in spiritual Babylon, but has grown fat, soft and flabby. Only a remnant of the physical nation returned to Jerusalem. Only a remnant of the spiritual nation has returned to the Jerusalem above. And of the remnant that returned, even fewer accepted the deity of Jesus of Nazareth. Likewise, of the remnant of spiritual Israel that has returned to rebuild temples of God, few will hear Jesus' voice and believe the One who sent Him. Many are called, but few are chosen (Matt 22:14). All have been invited to the wedding feast, but even among Sabbath-observing Christians, few strive for perfection; few

strive to walk uprightly before God. Most behave as the Pharisees did—now that they have the Sabbath, they make an idol of it by making Sabbath observance the test of genuine discipleship. Break the Sabbath and the disciple is a “nominal Christian,” an ugly identifying phrase that has an even uglier application. The phrase places all of the eighth day Church into the category of “the dead” [i.e., those who have never been quickened, or born of Spirit].

The mission field for the spiritual remnant that has returned to the Jerusalem above is the eighth day Church. The mission is the recovery of those genuine disciples who are currently being taught to erase the laws of God that have been written on their hearts and put into their minds. And whereas the 16th-Century Swiss Radicals were unable to refute the arguments of Zwingli against the necessity of adult baptism, overturning those arguments are today mere child’s play. The task today is getting genuine disciples covered by the Passover sacraments of Bread and Wine, so that these disciples will live through the liberation of the spiritually holy nation from bondage to sin. Too few disciples take the sacraments as Jesus established the example.

The second Passover is approaching. Those disciples who have been on a long journey or who have been spiritually defiled can take the sacraments—and should!

“The first and chief aim of the [Swiss] Radicals was not (as is usually stated) the opposition to infant baptism, still less to sprinkling or pouring, but the establishment of a pure church of converts in opposition to the mixed church of the world. The rejection of infant baptism followed as a necessary consequence. They were not satisfied with separation from popery; they wanted a separation from all the ungodly. They appealed to the example of the disciples in Jerusalem, who left the synagogue and the world” (*History*—Vol VIII).

The first and chief aim of endtime Sabbatarian radicals is the establishment of a pure Church, one with enough love for the scattered sheep of the lost house of Israel to fight against an Adversary disguised as an angel of light, and his many servants, disguised as ministers of righteousness. And as with the 16th-Century Swiss radicals, endtime Sabbatarians are not of a unified theology. Rather, they are unified in their opposition to an imposed eighth day Sabbath—and they will die, as did Swiss Anabaptists, for their beliefs during the first half of the seven years of tribulation. There is no place of safety in this world for Radicals, who desire to construct a new Church from the Bible. Only the remnant that understands prophecy will survive (Rev 12:17). Those who hold the testimony of Jesus have the spirit of prophecy (Rev 19:10).

From the early Swiss Radicals come today’s Sabbatarian Christians. The spiritual lineage is direct. And as the State Churches drove the Radicals from place to place, so too will Sabbatarian Christians be driven from place to place once the seven, endtime years of tribulation begin. If the Sabbatarian loves that portion of the world where he or she presently resides, the person will lose his or her physical life there. For the gospel will be spread during the tribulation as it was spread by Swiss Anabaptists.

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