

# WHAT WAS LOST IN THE APOSTASY?

by Evan A. Fry

In common with all of the Protestant world, and with many of the best Catholic historians as well, Latter Day Saints believe that the Church founded by Christ, and further established by His apostles, did not long re-main the Church He had expected and commanded it to be. To put it quite plainly, the Church went into apos-tasy. A great many men, both within and without the Church, recognized that something was wrong and tried to do something about it. Councils of the Church met at more or less regular intervals to deal with new here-sies that had sprung up and to formulate new creeds and catechisms.

A few great and far-seeing men within the Church saw the need for reform in certain fields and instigated those reforms in spite of opposition, which always re-sents any tampering with that which time has sanctioned. The great reformers arose, beginning their work of re-form within the established Church, but usually being forced to break away from that Church, and to establish their own fellowship of believers and worshipers. More reformers arose to reform the reformed; denominations branched off here and there and multiplied; but ultimately all got back to this fact, that the Church and the gospel of Christ had been lost somehow during or pre-ceding the Dark Ages.

Latter Day Saints believe that the apostasy was pre-dicted by Christ and by the apostles, who warned spe-cifically against it; but that it became an established fact. For the sake of convenience, we date the apostasy from the conversion of Constantine because that was the beginning of the end. We do reverence to the memory of the reformers who undertook to correct the abuses and errors of apostasy, often at the cost of their lives. We are grateful for the contributions they made to the world's thinking and to the Church's theology. We agree with them that the Church of Christ was lost in the wilderness during the Dark Ages. But we cannot agree that Reformation was sufficient to restore that Church to its pristine simplicity and purity of doctrine. An act of God was necessary—an act of Restoration.

The first thing which was lost in the apostasy was

Christ's original simplicity and purity of doctrine. It was not surprising in the comparatively new church, to find countless new theories and doctrines and dogmas creeping in from among the new converts, each of whom had his own peculiar background of former faith and belief. Paul, and Peter, and John all foresaw this danger, warned against it, and fought against it. So long as the church was fairly small, held compactly together by persecution, and guided by the spiritual ministry of the apostles, these doctrinal differences could be resolved and heresy put down. But when Christianity became the popular and official state religion, converts flocked to it faster than they could be assimilated; and theological anarchy was the result. This anarchy was stabilized into orthodoxy by the Council of Nicaea in 325; and ever since that day men have been rewriting and revising their creeds in an attempt to reconcile the thousand and one conflicts between past and present, between science and religion, between orthodoxy and common sense.

The second thing which was lost in the apostasy was the original perfection in church organization. There are many who say that Christ did not organize a Church; that the Church was organized on the day of Pentecost. But although His Church was not complete, it seems fairly obvious that Jesus did have some pretty definite plans and blueprints for His Church, which it was His intention for the apostles to carry on to completion. He had chosen twelve apostles, and Paul says that he had set them in the Church. He had chosen seventies to assist the work of the apostles. In His instructions on reconciling offenses, He had counseled that when per-sonal attempts at reconciliation failed, the one seeking satisfaction should tell it to the church." The Acts and the epistles of the New Testament draw us a picture—a rather sketchy picture to be sure—of a simple Church organization, functional in form, without pomp or riches or worldly power, and containing such officers as apostles, prophets, seventies, deacons, elders, bishops, and pastors.

But with the coming of apostasy, the head of the

church eventually became the temporal, as well as the spiritual ruler, of the Roman Empire. Candidates for church office and for priesthood were no longer selected by the voice of the Spirit, but by political expediency. Forsaking the example of Christ, those who called them-selves His ambassadors and representatives vied with each other for political power, for riches, for worldly pomp and glitter and glory. Thus was the whole ec-clesiastical structure of the church of Christ changed, until it bore absolutely no resemblance to the original.

The third thing which the church lost in the apostasy was its humility. Men who fall into sin and stubbornly refuse to repent cannot remain humble; they have to assert their own correctness and infallibility to justify their own error. And churches, are the same way. The humble person, who is not quite sure that he has all the truth, is much more apt to be right than the cocksure, stubbornly opinionated one who knows it all. When the Christian church became all-powerful, in state as well as in the field of morals and dogma, she lost her humility. She undertook the regulation of the thinking of men. She dictated what should be taught. She used force to win converts. She invoked the power of the state, which was under her control, to punish and to suppress heresy. She persecuted all who would not agree with her; she attempted to force all men to come to her. What a dif-ference between this attitude and the Christ who de-signed to draw all men unto Him through the humble suffering of the cross, or the Christ who wept over Jeru-salem which might have come to Him, but would not.

The fourth thing which was lost in the apostasy was the original simplicity of the Church's ordinances and sacraments. The rite of baptism, which was always ad-ministered by immersion in the early Church, was too inconvenient for kings and nobles who didn't want to get wet, and too slow for conquerors who had converted thousands and tens of thousands at the point of the sword. So immersion was changed to sprinkling. The simple memorial meal of the last supper became a complex and lengthy ritual, confused by the doctrine of transubstantiation. Pageantry and symbolism were brought into the church, whose founder used only the symbolism of homely parables and only the pageantry of a slow march up the hill of Calvary. In the name of Him who took little children up in His arms and blessed them, and who said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," little children were baptized to save them from an eternal torture in hell. In the name of Him who promised that His Spirit would guide into all truth, and who counseled His dis-ciples to seek that truth, to ask for it, to knock

that it might be opened unto them, men were taught the dark things of ignorance and superstition.

The fifth thing that was lost in the apostasy was per-sonal and corporate morality or righteousness. Sin became not so much something that had to be made right with God and with the one wronged, as something which had to be made right with the church. It became easy to buy forgiveness of sin, either before or after it was committed. The representatives of the church be-came rich and greedy and pitiless of the poor. Lust and license and adultery became common, even among the clergy, while the church held up the ideal of celibacy. Intrigue and plottings led more and more often to vio-lence, robbery, and even murder. Literature, art, sci-ence, invention, and drama all decayed. Education was neglected. Men's rights and dignities were abridged more and more, or stripped from them completely. The lights went out in Europe, and in the world.

If these things be true (and no one can say that they are not) where was the Church of Christ at the end of the Dark Ages? There are three possible theories which you may subscribe to. One is, that in spite of her mis-takes and wanderings, and in spite of the im-perfections and sins of her priesthood, the Church continued on down in unbroken succession from the time of Christ and the apostles, learning as she grew, struggling to-ward perfection, but still unqualifiedly entitled to be known as the Church of Christ. Another theory is that this Church of the Dark Ages was still potentially the Church of Christ, but not actually, because of the apos-tasy; therefore a reformation was needed. The third theory is that things were so far gone that only one thing could ever establish the Church of Christ as it was in the beginning—Restoration.

There is a delicate point of logical argument here. At what point is apostasy complete? Suppose that you hired a man to run a business for you. You had drawn very definite and specific plans for that business, and had outlined its policies, its organization, its methods. But as the years went by, and you were still unable to be present to run that business in person, your old trusted employees died off and were replaced by newcomers, who changed the administrative setup, the methods of doing business, the purposes of the bus-iness, and the rules by which it was run. Suppose further that they began to use that business as a means of self-aggrandizement and power, and that eventually they succeeded in manipulating affairs in such a way that you would be ashamed to have your name used in connection with that business. Suppose furthermore that your investment in that

business had been lost through the machinations of these evil men, who during your absence had shouldered you out. If you wanted to re-establish that or a similar business again in the same location, what would you do—try to take over the old, complete with its false servants, its erroneous policies, and its altered and dishonest business methods, recognizing it as still yours? Or would you try to crowd into that business where you were not wanted and reform it, still keeping it under your name? Or would you start a new business, beginning all over again with new employees, and a restoration of the old policies which had once made your original business a success of which you could be proud?

This brings us to the sixth thing which Latter Day Saints believe was lost in the apostasy—the authority to speak for, act for, or represent God—or in other words, the authority of priesthood. Just where the breaking point is might be open for argument, but it is inescapable that no man is going to continue to recognize as his representative another man who ignores his instructions, violates the rules, does not carry out the work assigned, and in general does exactly the opposite to what he has been commanded to do.

Latter Day Saints do not believe that God will go on indefinitely recognizing such unfaithful servants, either. They believe that the authority of the Church was lost during the dark ages, as a result of apostasy, and that a Restoration was necessary to make the Church of Christ a functioning body upon the earth once more.

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