

**THE MYSTERY OF GOD
SHALL BE FINISHED**

**THE
SARDIS
CHURCH AGE**
REFORMATION OR RESTORATION?

A STUDY IN THE RESTORATION OF THE CHURCH

No 8

THE SARDIS CHURCH AGE

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PREFACE

It is a great pleasure, having concluded our examination of the downward fall of the Church, to commence an analysis of her progressive restoration to the original blueprint.

Roughly speaking, the Sardis age spans the 16th and 17th C.

Apart from the early days of the Church, there is probably no period so well known among evangelical Christians as the one we are about to consider, the Reformation. Yet, despite its fame, its overall place in the work of God in history has, oddly, often been significantly misunderstood. This is for two main reasons:

- a lack of sufficient historical documentation, until recent years, to enable a proper assessment of the many different streams of religious thought in that period; and, more seriously,
- the inability of Christians properly to assess the achievements of this age in an overall Spiritual context.

It is my purpose to rectify the latter using both Scripture and relatively recently known historical information.

From the outset I emphasise that this work does not profess to be a comprehensive historical survey of the Reformation. Many books already provide this.

My overriding aim is to show how the Reformation was but the first stage towards a full restoration of all that was lost since the early Church. A major foundation was laid. But the Reformation did not effect a full recovery of all the Truth lost to the Church. Its name is very appropriate. It was indeed a reformation, but not a full restoration.

The Reformation was an unfinished and an unfulfilled work.

In addition to the books listed in earlier studies, much help has been gained in this study from:

- L. Verduin, *The Reformers and their Stepchildren* (Paternoster)
- W R Estep, *The Anabaptist Story* (Eerdmans)
- H Cadbury, *George Fox's 'Book of Miracles'* (Cambridge University Press)

As before, I acknowledge the cheerful help of my late wife, Carol, in preparing the original draft typescript. It is also a pleasure to thank my long-standing friend, Howard Jones, for consenting to edit the final draft of the original 1981 edition.

In producing the current electronic version I have taken the opportunity to fully revise the book stylistically whilst retaining the underlying content.

Further studies in this series may be viewed on my website, www.endtimerestoration.com. Hard copies may be obtained by emailing me using the contact form on the website.

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REFORMATION OR RESTORATION?

(a) The loss and recovery of the knowledge of Christ

In the studies in this series thus far I have sought above all to show the pattern behind the progressive downward fall of the Church from her first love and high calling.

Church history before the Reformation is no more and no less than the gradual loss of the full experience of Christ as *all and in all*. Even if Christ-centred terminology was retained, the living experience of Christ was progressively lost.

Each stage in the Church's experience has been described from the standpoint of the fulfilling of the prophetic foreview of Church history given in the letters to the seven churches of Asia. So far we have examined the decline in the first four churches culminating in *the depths of Satan* (Rev. 2:24) in the long Thyatira period.

Now at long last the downward trend is about to be reversed. In this and succeeding studies we shall describe how the Church's downward fall is reversed. Step-by-step she will progressively recover the full knowledge of Christ lost over the previous centuries.

It is important to understand the nature of this recovery. It is not so much the recovery of Truth as the recovery of He Who is the Truth. The period from the Reformation onwards is not simply a progressive retrieval of the many doctrines lost since the early Church. It is a gradual unfolding once more not only of the doctrine of Christ but of the full experiential knowledge of Him in the way He was set forth by the early apostles.

It is no coincidence that Paul places our coming into the *unity of the faith* alongside the full *knowledge of the Son of God* in describing how we may attain *unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ* (Eph. 4:13). Nor is it a coincidence that the converse of being *carried about with every wind of doctrine* is to *grow up into Him in all things* (Eph. 4:12-13). Doctrine, when understood by Spiritual revelation, is not a mere accumulation of theological information. It is an experimental knowledge and appropriation of different facets of Christ Himself. Note how Paul puts it:

But ye have not so learned Christ: if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus (Eph. 4:20-21).

What I am trying to say is this: the Reformation inaugurates a new period in which the truths lost over previous years are to be recovered. But such a recovery entails not just recovered doctrine. It is the revelation and restoration of Christ Himself as the believer's total sufficiency in every situation at every moment. Each stage in the recovery of Truth will unveil a new facet of Christ to the Church.

The ultimate objective will be to bring her to full maturity, a maturity measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ expressed through His earthly body, the Church.

In the pre Reformation period attention was drawn to three main areas in which the knowledge of Christ was lost:

- (i) Christ as Head of the government of His body (Ephesus and Smyrna Ages);
- (ii) Christ as the individual believer's sanctification (Pergamos Age); and
- (iii) Christ as the individual believer's justification (Thyatira Age)

From the Reformation onwards this process will be reversed.

Let us now consider the first stage in the progressive restitution of the Church's lost inheritance, the Reformation, or Sardis, Age.

(b) *Salvation is of the Lord*

Although certainly not the only doctrine of the Reformers, unquestionably the essence of their teaching was justification by faith alone.

Their central emphasis was on the sovereignty of God in salvation. God alone saves. There is nothing that man can do. Man was reduced to utter impotence before God. No work of merit could in any way bring about his justification. Every facet of redemption was wholly dependent upon God. Even faith itself, like grace, was the gift of God (Eph 2:8—9). There was therefore not even scope for pride in the very fact of believing in Christ's justifying work. Faith was utterly dependent upon divine revelation rather than human reason (Matt 11:25—27). Without such Spiritual revelation the natural mind was incapable of understanding (1 Cor 2:14). No man could recognise Christ for Who He is but by the revelation of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:2). Unless the Father drew him, none could come to Christ (John 6:44—45).

At every level, from start to finish, God alone was the Source of our salvation. The very word at the heart of salvation, grace, implied that man in himself had no hope in, nor claim on, God.

Whatever the doctrinal differences between the mainstream continental reformers, there was little disagreement over the sovereignty of God, except for Calvin's doctrine of predestination unto damnation. Although Luther taught predestination unto salvation he did not go as far as Calvin. The latter also extended Luther's doctrine of possessing assurance of justification to include also the certainty of eternal salvation.

Apart from this, however, there is an extensive convergence of views between Luther and Calvin on the issue of justification by faith alone apart from works of merit. Man is devoid of free will to do good. Since the Fall, he has known total depravity. Man can do nothing but sin, and is naturally without a true knowledge of God. Human reason was useless as a means of restoration. The strongest emphasis with Luther, as with Calvin, was upon the all-pervading action of God in salvation and the total depravity and incapacity of man.

It is difficult for the contemporary believer to understand the revolutionary effect of such teaching upon those so long held in bondage to the papal system. The whole structure designed to bind men to the system and priesthood of Rome to ensure salvation was swept away. Christ's merits were proclaimed as freely given apart from any papal mediation.

Within a short time the whole gamut of blasphemous practices, such as indulgences and prayer to saints, inserted by Rome between Christ and the individual believer, was abolished. The Mass as a sacrifice was denied. Other sacraments (said by Rome to be means of imparting grace), such as extreme unction and holy orders, were rejected. Monastic vows, pilgrimages and other man-made works to attain merit were abolished.

In short everything in the realm of justification tending to replace direct contact between Christ and the believer, or to achieve merit in the eyes of God by human endeavour rather than the undeserved free grace of Christ, was put away.

After feeling the increasingly suffocating grip of the evil spirit of antichrist progressively smothering the life and knowledge of Christ from the Church, how refreshing to breathe the pure air of the Reformers' Christ-centred doctrine of justification. How blessed to feel the soul stripped of all hope but Christ Himself, and to taste Him as He is, without any human adulteration. After so many long years of ever deepening antichristian darkness, how sweet once more to hear the Name of Jesus, uncluttered by human tradition and interference. Truly of Him it is said, *thy name is as ointment poured forth* (SoS 1:3).

Now at last we are on the road to a full recovery of *the unsearchable riches of Christ*. The more I continue to study Church history nearer to our own day the more I feel an awesome anticipation of, and an ever deepening longing for, the fuller revelation of Christ Himself which is ours to partake of.

(c) *I have not found thy works perfect before God*

Our debt to the 16th C Reformers is great. They laid a solid and secure foundation for the full restoration of all that was lost since the early days of the Church. That foundation was the revelation of Christ our righteousness. This enabled man to commence his spiritual walk on a solid basis: Christ alone.

Having been firmly rooted in Christ, however, it is necessary to continue being built up in Him (Col 2:7a), growing up into Him in all things (Eph 4:15).

In this aspect the Reformation was seriously deficient. The foundation of the sovereignty of God in justification was well laid. From that point on, however, there was very much lacking. It would be left to later ages to reveal Christ more fully in His relationships other than justification to the individual believer and to the local church.

The major portion of the remainder of this study will analyse the nature of and causes for the deficiencies of the Reformation.

From the outset, I wish to emphasise that my purpose is constructive. I do not wish to detract from any of the unquestioned benefits of the Reformers' labours, nor to cast aspersions on their characters. My aim is to place the achievements of this age in their full overall setting in order to highlight the complete plan of restoration of the full knowledge of Christ. The brevity of the references to the achievements of, and debt due to, the Reformers is not to be construed as a lack of appreciation of them. I have taken the liberty of not providing so much information on these matters in view of the widespread acquaintance of most informed Christians with the benefits of the Reformation.

I have concentrated on the shortcomings because, whilst appreciating the importance of the Reformation, there is a very real danger of our failing to come to a balanced view of it, seeing it in the overall context of the Lord's full plan.

I myself once imagined the Reformation as a glorious age of unqualified and unblemished restoration. Although as time went on certain features increasingly puzzled me, it was not until I read Leonard Verduin's *Stepchildren of the Reformation* that I really understood their full significance. Since then the overall pattern of Church history became immeasurably clearer.

For the first time I was able to understand how the words of our Lord to the church at Sardis could apply to the Reformation. It has always amazed me how the more the details of Church history are delved into, the more they tie in with the letters to the seven churches of Asia.

This brings me to the final reason why I concentrate on the shortcomings of the Reformation in this study: the testimony of the Spirit Himself.

A key phrase addressed to the Sardis church was:

I have not found thy works perfect before God (Rev 3:2b).

The reason for the Lord's reproof is clearer from a study of the word 'perfect'. Literally it means: "fulfilled, perfected, complete, filled up to the full".

Paul spoke of a *dispensation of God ... to fulfil* (i.e. fully preach) *the Word of God* (Col 1:25). (Cp NIV, "*present the Word of God in its fulness.*") The Reformers failed in this commission. The Reformation Gospel is not the full Gospel. Theirs was an unfulfilled work. They began well but failed to bring to completion. Many of their teachings were good, as far as they went. The trouble was, they did not go far enough.

We find an even more solemn indictment by the Spirit of the Reformation age when we examine the consequences of the failure to complete what they had begun and to turn their initial reforms into a full-scale restoration.

(d) *Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain*

These words are solemn. Not only did the Reformers fail to complete what they begun. They also lost much of what they initially had.

The following words of the Lord give an insight into the consequences of the Reformers' not bringing their works to completion:

Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: FOR I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent (Rev 3:2—3a)

The reason their remaining Spiritual possessions were so near to death is explicitly said to be their failure to bring the works they had begun to their conclusion.

This is no mere academic point. In the following three chapters we shall see how accurately this is reflected in historical developments. Time and again we shall see how the Reformers fell back even from truths which they did once have, after they refused to progress into the full implications of them.

Even worse, they upbraided and persecuted those who did progress. It is a serious matter to draw back from revelation. It is even more serious, having once recognised and acknowledged that revelation, to persecute those who do press on.

In the endeavour to throw the evils of Rome into stark relief, much that was questionable in the actions of the Reformers has been played down. Especially in the present century, however, much new light has been thrown on the struggle for Truth against the tyrannies of Rome by historical research into non-Catholic groups striving for the full freedom of the Word other than the Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed bodies. Many who were previously misrepresented as wild fanatics (often by the Reformers themselves) are now known to have been godly and sober lovers of the Truth.

Before launching into the historical study, however, let us briefly consider the prophetic assessment of this age by the Spirit to show how precise is the comparison between the Sardis church and the Reformation period.

- *Be watchful* This means literally “become awake”. It is not an exhortation to remain alert. Sardis had actually fallen asleep on guard duty. The Lord urgently calls it to arouse from sleep lest any more of that which had been committed to it was lost. In God’s estimation, concerning a Spiritual awareness of what was taking place around them, the Reformers and their heirs had actually fallen fast asleep!
- *Strengthen the things which remain* “Strengthen” means literally not simply to give strength, but to make steadfast, fix and establish for permanency. It is thus plainly implied that much that the Reformers once had they had lost.
- *that are ready to die* This is even more solemn than the previous phrase. If action was not taken to firmly establish that which DID remain, the Reformation was in danger of losing everything. Survival itself was at stake. I suspect it is little realised how real this danger was. The clear testimony of the Spirit is that even that which they had not lost their grip on was actually on the very point of death. This sombre situation is underlined in the words to the overcomer: *he that overcometh I will not blot his name out of the Book of Life*. This carries the awful yet undeniable implication that there were those in such danger. (Of course, these words are not simply addressed to the Reformers but to the whole Sardis age. The seeds of destruction sown by the Reformers were allowed to develop after their deaths in the systems they begun.)
- *Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard* This is graphically expressed by one translator: “Go back to what you heard and believed at first”. The very word “Remember” implies to bring back to mind something once known and since forgotten. “Received” implies in its original language the receipt of something as a permanent deposit. The Reformers have no alibi. They not only refused to go into the full Word, but did so in violation of their own early convictions. Greater light had been given to them, but they put it out of mind. The opportunity had been there.

- *and hold fast and repent* The only safe course of action was to repent, to undergo a change of mind and heart, and to TURN BACK to their early convictions. It was imperative to hold tight to that first entrusted deposit of Truth at all costs.

(e) Conclusion

Sadly, little heed was taken of the warnings of the Spirit to this age.

Not only was the opportunity lost of restoring further Truth beyond that which was recovered. With the passage of time the reality of that Truth which did remain was lost to a very large degree in the experience of the majority of mainline Protestant Christendom, whether Anglican, Lutheran or Reformed. There were extensive disputes over the merits of different creeds and doctrines, and an ever-declining measure of true Spiritual Life.

This in turn led to the upsurge of various groups in England and the continent, each in their own way endeavouring to find in fuller measure the experience of Christ.

I shall consider the latter more fully in Chapter 6. In the next three chapters, however, I wish to give an outline historical survey of the Reformation to demonstrate clearly how accurately the Sardis church reflects the Reformation period. In chapter 5 I shall summarise the mainline Reformation by reviewing the major areas where it failed to restore the full Word. This will set it in its proper context in the overall plan of restoration.

Yes, this age truly did see a reform of much papal error and abuse. But it was certainly not a full-blooded restoration.

MARTIN LUTHER AND THE GERMAN REFORMATION

(a) Introduction

However much we appreciate the benefits of the Reformation, it is necessary to assess it in the light of God's word.

For far too long there has been a serious failure amongst Protestants to see the Reformation in its full context. The single act of Luther's rebellion against certain Romish doctrines and the subsequent spread of the Reformation throughout Europe are often thought to imply a clean sweep of the accumulated errors of many centuries. One commentator, for example, describes Luther as "next to Jesus and Paul, the greatest man of all the ages".

Such thinking reveals a complete failure to grasp the proper place of the Reformation in the full restoration of the Church to her first love.

The Reformation was not a full restoration. It was only a step along the right path. The foundation of justification by faith laid in this age was vital. But it was not a complete rebuilding of the whole fabric of the Church.

It is essential to establish this clearly.

Those who consider that merely returning to the teachings of the Reformers is a sure path to Spiritual revival are badly mistaken. The Church as a whole has been led step-by-step into greater light since then, and restored more fully to her original calling and hope. To return to any single age or person used by God in the past in the process of restoration would be a retrograde step. *Let us go on unto perfection* (Hebrews 6:1), the perfection of the fulness of the new covenant.

Commencing with Luther, let us now examine the historical record to show precisely how and why the mainline Reformers failed to restore the Church to the FULL Word.

(b) The debt owed to Luther

Unquestionably, the courage of our brother Martin Luther was the means used of God to release Christendom from the vice-like grip of Rome.

Being taught by certain enlightened monks that forgiveness of sin came only through the Blood, he came to experience the assurance of his own personal salvation.

Such was the revelation to the darkened heart of this earnest Catholic monk that his spirit rose up in rebellion against the evil Roman practice of the sale of indulgences (i.e. the remission of periods of punishment in purgatory in exchange for cash payments). In 1517 he nailed his famous 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg, challenging the Rome to defend this

blasphemous practice. The whole of Wittenberg was in commotion. In less than 14 days the theses were known throughout Germany.

The papacy sought to cajole and flatter Luther into silence in vain. So, in 1520 he was excommunicated. But, instead of yielding, Luther withdrew from the Roman organisation completely and from then on assumed an uncompromising antagonism to it.

The matter was not so easily settled, however. Rome still exterminated her enemies through the civil power. Under papal pressure the Holy Roman Emperor summoned Luther to an assembly of the German States at Worms in 1521. Despite all odds and the likelihood of being burned or betrayed, Luther courageously bore witness before the assembled nobility. His calmness of spirit deeply effected the thousands gathered. There, before the ruler of the largest empire since Charlemagne, he uttered his famous words: "Here I take my stand; I cannot do otherwise: may God be my help! Amen."

The effect of the events of these five short years cannot easily be described adequately. The raising of Luther's voice and his refusal to retract seemed to liberate something. Europe was ablaze. Scandinavia, Denmark, Holland, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, Spain, France, and Britain were all affected. Earnest-minded men rose up everywhere and preached salvation through Christ.

Although all through the Dark Ages many fine men had boldly stood against error and preached the Word, this was different. It was not so much that Luther was more worthy than they, but rather as though something had been bound in the heavenlies. All of a sudden there was a lifting on a very wide scale of the oppressive and suffocating spirit of fear and bondage upon western Europe. It was as though God Himself had loosed His Word that it might have free course and abound. Luther's obedience emboldened many to rise up and cry out against the prevailing spiritual darkness.

Luther's reference to the Bible as the sole source of authority had a dramatic effect. He himself translated the Bible into German. Increased Scripture reading changed Christendom. Multitudes of laymen, priests, bishops, cardinals and even popes had never even read the Word of Life. Luther's rejection of the authority of popes, church councils and revered theologians of the past cut the ground from underneath the vast monolithic Nicolaitan system of Rome. Luther's Bible translation, more than any other of his writings, consolidated the progress of the Reformation. Henceforth men increasingly sought Biblical proof for the doctrines taught them. The iron grip of the priesthood over the minds of the people was greatly weakened.

In addition, the fundamental doctrine of the Reformation, that a man is justified by faith alone without the deeds of the Law, further weakened the already loosened grip.

A multitude of Romish inventions to keep the sinner from direct access to the Saviour was swept away. Whenever men are taught to go direct to Christ, the power of a Nicolaitan priesthood is broken. The last vital link between Christ and man to be lost in the downward fall of the Church was the first to be restored. Individual salvation by faith in Christ's finished work was proclaimed far and wide. The Body was once more beginning to get a grip on its Head, Christ Himself, without recourse to any intermediary.

The debt owed to Luther was well summed up by E H Broadbent:

“Luther by his mighty strokes hewed a way through ..., so that reform became possible. He revealed Christ to countless sinners as the Saviour to whom each one was invited to come, without intervention of priest or saint or church or sacrament, not on account of any goodness in himself, but as a sinner in all his needs, to find in Christ, through faith in Him, perfect salvation, founded in the perfect work of the Son of God”.

Broadbent’s next comment, however, leads into our following section: “INSTEAD OF CONTINUING in the way of the Word ...”.

In common with the other main-line Reformers, our brother Martin Luther began well. But he failed to go on.

(c) Luther’s early and later phases

A careful examination of Luther’s life reveals two basic features:

1. He failed to take his reforming work to completion. What he begun was good, but he did not take his initial attempt to restore the whole Word to its conclusion.
2. As a direct consequence of the former, he not only failed to go on, but also actually withdrew even from Truth that he had earlier acknowledged and espoused.

How dangerous it is not to respond to revealed light! Undoubtedly there are pauses for consolidation in any attempt at full restoration. The danger arises, however, when the pause is because of fear of pressing into and embracing what is plainly understood. Pauses of this nature do not lead to an inner deepening and strengthening. They result in a weakening and lessening of Spiritual life and light, until even that which was once clearly understood becomes hazy and uncertain.

Tragically, such was the case with Martin Luther.

When Luther saw the revelation of the sufficiency of the Blood of Christ to atone for sin, this did not mean that he automatically saw all other Scriptural truth.

He remained within the Roman system for several years, whilst proclaiming: *the just shall live by faith*. Until his excommunication and final separation in 1520, he sought to reform the blasphemies of Rome from within. He accepted the basic system but sought to reform its abuses. His writings were still mixed with much that savoured of Catholicism.

After his separation he became much clearer in his rejection of the system itself. He called Rome Babylon, and the Pope Antichrist. Although there was still more light needed for a full understanding of the New Testament calling and hope of the Church, yet there was evidence of progress in his thinking. He spoke of insufficient Scriptural evidence for infant baptism, and of his desire to establish groups of believers separate from the world who would meet in homes for prayer, Scripture reading, baptism and the Lord’s supper.

Herein lay the seeds of the destruction of the whole Church-State system first developed in the Pergamos age, when world and Church joined in unholy matrimony. Not only would the formation of such groups have entailed the abandonment of the doctrine of Balaam. It would also have severely weakened the doctrine and deeds of the Nicolaitans.

(For a full explanation of the terms used in the last two sentences, the reader is referred to earlier studies in this series: "The Nicolaitan Structures", no 4, pp 13-22; "The Doctrine of Balaam", no 5, pp 1-14; "The church-state system", no 5, pp 15-26.)

Unfortunately, however, Luther failed to bring his work to completion.

Though confessing the Word as the sole authority, even after the decisive split with Catholicism his mind was never fully liberated from the shackles of the practices and organisation of this system. Time and again he revealed an undue regard for the religious traditions of previous years. He merely transplanted them into the new system arising in his name.

The key factor in the failure of Luther to advance into the fulness of God's purpose lay in the close relationships he developed with several of the German princes. After this he veered from his former path.

Before, he had hesitated over many Biblical truths, as though attempting both to return wholly to the Word, and at the same time to continue ancient religious traditions. Afterward he progressed no further into light. In fact, he found that even much of the light he did have became darkness. As a result the Lutheran Church emerging throughout Germany, Denmark and Scandinavia incorporated many things carried over from the Romish system alongside the revival of much Scriptural truth. Some abuses were reformed, but in many ways Lutheranism was a reproduction of the old system.

Let us see now how this came about.

After Luther's noble stand at Worms, the Spiritual power of the German Reformation declined once the protection of the reformed churches fell into the hands of the princes.

The Reformers were surrounded by very powerful Catholic powers and the political scene was very menacing. In the past whole provinces had been devastated by Catholic armies seeking to uproot "heresy". So, in their anxiety to obtain deliverance from the threatening power of the Pope, the Reformers put themselves under the protection of the Protestant princes. This was their grand failure. It was the Church-State union of Constantine all over again, except that this time it was a Protestant adulterous union instead of a Catholic one.

Luther was falling back into the same pit from which he had just been delivered.

Of course, the choice facing Luther was extremely solemn. Naturally speaking the emerging Protestant cause was liable to be swamped by the many antagonistic powers arrayed against it. Many would therefore both understand and support his action.

But, did God?

The choice made unquestionably led to a draining of Spiritual power. Does not this in itself indicate the Lord's response? This draining removed the very means which would have provided the strength to continue in the light already given. If it be said that Luther had no alternative, this is not supported by historical facts. All through history, including during the reformation itself, groups of believers have been enabled to stand firm and even to advance in

the face of a hostile State. Witness the early Church, for example, under the periodical persecutions of the Roman Empire.

The choice facing Luther was not one I would relish. My respect for him is not quenched by what has been written. But our Master calls us to go on to perfection and to be faithful unto death.

O Lord, give us grace to speak boldly, as we ought to speak.

(d) The new Church/State union

Let us now examine the emerging form of Lutheran church organisation substituted for the papal hierarchy during the period 1526-1529.

Luther once saw the New Testament pattern of independent local assemblies of believers only. It was not without an inward struggle that he abandoned this for the National or State Church system. In fairness, he often expressed regret for the loss of congregational independence that had once been his aim. He never pretended his emerging system was Scriptural, describing it only as "provisional". He became the victim of his alliance with the German Protestant princes and his decision to lean on their arm. Consequently the Lutheran Church was put under State control.

In deciding the form of the new Church the princes chose a system nearest the old papal system of parishes with clerical administration and the State enforcing ecclesiastical authority. Political rulers assumed full jurisdiction in religious matters, controlling church government, the form of public worship and the duties and salaries of the clergy.

The consequences of the new Church-State hybrid and its failure to regain locally governed assemblies guided by the Holy Ghost under the Headship of Christ were serious. The princes were not guided by the Word but by politics. Christ would not be the Head of this Church. There would be no room for the ministry of the gifts of the Holy Ghost or for the differing ministries of the members of the Body.

So, whilst he delivered many from bondage to the priesthood and the Catholic Church in the matter of individual justification, Luther failed to provide for the new-born believers a proper understanding of the nature and organisation of the local church. He did not restore the truth of the Church as the Body of Christ. Much of the ecclesiastical structure of Lutheran churches was virtually identical to the Nicolaitan power structure of the system they had just left.

Luther initiated a turning back from some of the worst papal abuses of the Thyatira period. But he only took the Church back to the early Pergamos age, not to the apostolic era. Reformation, yes; restoration, no.

The new Church-State union not only ensured the continuing ability of the Nicolaitan spirit to hinder the full union of the Body to her Head. It also hindered separation of the Church from the world.

The union of Church and State always results in a mingling of the Church with the world just as with the Church-State union of Constantine.

It is therefore no coincidence that the doctrine of separation is little known among denominations originating from the Reformation. The fall in standards of holiness is a fruit of imposing a national Church by State power. This is because a national Church seeks to include all in its area, thus incorporating many unregenerate people. Church discipline is not practised as in assemblies for believers only.

The absence of changed lives among many of his professed followers troubled Luther himself. But it was the fruit of his turning from earlier light on the true nature of the local churches. This was compounded by an overemphasis in his doctrine, on the legal aspect of our justification by faith apart from works without a balancing emphasis on regeneration and a faith that results in a changed life and good works. Justification is the forensic aspect of salvation. Regeneration is the Holy Ghost inspired life-changing aspect.

The Reformation failed to recover the truth of the power of godliness and of the sanctification of the Spirit. But this would come with the increased light of the Philadelphia age.

(e) Luther & the Anabaptists

So far I have evaluated Luther's ministry from two main angles:

1. To emphasise the very real debt owed to this brother by the whole of Christendom. None of my remarks are intended to diminish the extent of this debt.
2. To measure his reforming work from the standpoint of the need for a full restoration, pinpointing some of the most serious shortcomings.

If Luther's shortcomings had simply been his hesitation and failure to continue in his initial steps, it would not be so tragic. Sadly, however, this is not the complete picture. Not only did our brother not take the work he begun to its conclusion, he draw back from ground he at one time had repossessed. Most tragic of all, Luther then opposed those who did continue pressing on into greater light.

It was the tragedy of King Asa all over again.

Asa was a good man (2 Chr 14:2) and sought to remove the evils of a false worship (14:3-4). Like Luther, his early God-given successes gave him courage to take his reforming work even further (15:8).

But unfortunately, in the 36th year of his reign, Asa acted foolishly. He ceased to rest on the arm of the Lord. Even though the Lord had earlier routed an Ethiopian army of one million men, Asa now hired the Syrians to strengthen his defences against an invasion from Israel. The Lord sent a prophet to reprove him. Instead of humbling himself, Asa was very angry, imprisoning the prophet and oppressing certain of the people (16:7-10), doubtless those who voiced their support for the Word of the Lord.

Like Asa, Luther in his early years (up to about 1525) stood up single-handed against the two mightiest powers of his day: the Emperor Charles V and the Pope. But when he later looked for State support, he incurred the Lord's displeasure. Many who had supported him hitherto turned from him and persevered themselves on the road to full restoration. But Luther opposed them.

This led to a judicial hardening. In the case of Asa, his last six years were fruitless. Even the chastisement designed to restore him only hardened him still further and he refused to break (16:12-13). So with Luther. From about 1525, and especially from 1530, till his death (1546) he was never the same. Once the constitution of the churches and the defence of the Truth were entrusted to the Protestant princes, Luther's public testimony ceased. Henceforth the battle was fought by diplomacy and not by the sword of the Spirit. One of Luther's biographers noted that, although he continued his duties with zeal, "yet amid those various occupations it was remarked that his enterprising spirit appeared to undergo abatement, and that, in his latter years, he was found to hazard no new doctrine". His drawing back had quenched something.

But what of those who went on? Who were they, and how did they fare?

The usual term for these people is "Anabaptist". They were scattered throughout Europe in Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Poland, Austria and Czechoslovakia. Their name is not so much that of a particular party or a single coherent movement as a general term to describe all those in the Reformation period who went further than the main-line Reformers in their return to the fulness of the Word.

For many years "Anabaptist" was a term of reproach associated with heretical and extreme practices and teachings. Recent historical research, however, has shown that this was a very unbalanced picture. Certain extremists did arise among them. In addition, as always among persecuted groups, there were sincere people lacking good leaders, these having been imprisoned or killed. They were thus open to the peculiarities and eccentricities of those who aspired to a leadership role. The more representative Anabaptists, however, had no sympathy with the eccentric views and practices of the extremists. They dissociated themselves clearly from them.

When the more famous European Reformers were hesitating, it was they who continued to press on towards a full restoration of New Testament Christianity.

When the Reformation first began, independent congregations sprang up all over Europe, practising believers' baptism, and determined to carry out the teachings of the New Testament. Many of their founders came from earlier groups forced to operate underground owing to their being banned by the State. They were the Spiritual heirs of they who throughout the long dreary Dark Ages had sought, in the face of continual persecution, to maintain a testimony to the Truth against the excesses of the papal system. They inherited much of the teaching of those groups which, though imperfect, was greatly purified from the blasphemies of Rome.

Initially Luther and other early Reformers were in sympathy with the aspirations and teachings of these groups. These in turn supported and set great hopes upon the Reform movement. Luther originally claimed that there was insufficient Scriptural evidence for infant baptism, and expressed a desire to abandon the Church-State union, returning to a church of believers only. In matters of faith, he wrote, the State should not enforce adherence to any particular religion.

Once Luther accepted the German princes ruling over his provisional churches, however, he and the Anabaptists parted company. Henceforth they reproached him for going back on his first principles.

After he hesitated and the resultant separation, a judicial hardening came upon Luther. His Spiritual judgement was impaired, and he fell back into much of the error from which he had just been delivered. Like the Roman system before him, he began to advocate using the sword of the State to enforce the “right” religion. But this time it was the Lutheran religion instead of the Catholic one.

The civil authorities were urged to suppress “heretics” (i.e. non-Lutherans). As with Augustine, the Old Testament was used to justify State punishment of religious dissent. It was a return to the *weak and beggarly* elements. Luther now wrote that private gatherings of believers should be forbidden and that only those authorised by the State Church should preach. Offenders were to be banished on pain of capital punishment. He also recommended the threat of punishment and exile to compel attendance at the Lutheran State Church and the death penalty for heretics.

Thus, when Luther turned back from the light he had, he not only went back to a system in many respects like the one he had come out of. He also, like Asa, oppressed those who desired to adhere more fully than he to the divine pattern. They acted as his conscience; a reminder of what he had himself once seen but drawn back from.

Just as Asa’s rebellion caused him to become hardened to the voice of God in his sickness, so Luther henceforth was unable to rightly divide the Word of Truth. A haze seemed to blur his Spiritual judgement. It is very dangerous to draw back from light, and even more so to oppose those who do go on. If you will not go on, do not impede those who do.

One of the saddest incidents in Luther’s life illustrates this judicial blindness.

Transubstantiation is one of the crowning blasphemies of Rome, the claim that the bread and wine of the communion are literally changed into the body and blood of Christ. The Swiss Reformers early rejected this. Luther, however, strongly resisted them. He advocated a peculiar compromise called “consubstantiation”. By this meaningless term he claimed that the bread and wine remained just what they were AND that they were the material substance of Christ’s body. From 1524 till 1529 Luther wrote so bitterly against the Swiss, and so little against Catholicism that it was sarcastically said the Lutherans were eagerly returning to the bosom of Rome.

Despite attempts to heal the breach with the Swiss Reformers, Luther refused even to acknowledge them as brethren. His attitude disillusioned many. No longer was he standing alone with the Word. Now he was but the head of a party defending his own position and unable to be corrected. Turning from his early light blinded him to further revelation. He seemed incapable of receiving Spiritual insight. Not only did he uphold the Roman doctrine of the power of the priest to bring Christ into the bread, he also maintained her teaching of baptismal regeneration.

Thus Lutheranism, though having great influence, lost the affections of many sympathetic to the Reformation. Some joined the French or Swiss Reformers or the Anabaptists, depending on how far they were prepared to go in returning to the original blueprint of the Church. Others even returned to Catholicism or remained there when they might otherwise have left.

Lutheranism itself remained as a tragic memorial of the consequences of a failure to go on to full maturity. It was a compromise between the Roman system and the full New Testament pattern. It had begun to climb out of the Thyatira depths of satan, but stopped before achieving a full deliverance.

3

THE REFORMATION IN SWITZERLAND

The growth of the Nicolaitan spirit in the first 4 ages was not just a feature of Catholicism. It was at work wherever Christianity spread, whether in the Western Roman Empire, the Greek Orthodox East, or the Persian churches.

Likewise in the Sardis age the trend to advance then fall back affected all the main Reformation groups. It was not just a peculiarity of Luther.

Having examined the German Reformation, let us now consider the two chief Swiss Reformers, Zwingli and Calvin.

i) Zwingli and German-speaking Switzerland

(a) Introduction

Although Luther is perhaps the most widely known of the Reformers, he was not in fact the first to begin proclaiming justification by faith in the finished work of Christ alone. Ulrich Zwingli (1484—1531) preached this before him in 1516, having no previous contact with Luther.

Indeed, all over Europe this same truth began to be proclaimed about the same time by different individuals with no prior contact. This shows the work of the one Spirit overshadowing the Continent, producing a unity that cannot be attributed to earthly connections.

Not only did the Holy Spirit turn men's minds to identical thoughts in widely scattered places, however. The evil spirit of antichrist was likewise astonishingly uniform in his response to frustrate the full restoration plan of God. The grand failure of the Reformers was:

- To hold back from going on into all the truth they initially recognised,
- Then to lose their grip on part of even that truth which they had seen.
- Finally, having failed to fully deliver themselves from the *weak and beggarly* elements of the Roman system, they persecuted those who did seek to go on.

(I hope this again reveals the extent to which Church history is a gigantic spiritual conflict. Instead of merely seeing certain historical characters such as Luther, Zwingli, Calvin etc., much clearer insight is gained by viewing the two grand protagonists struggling together, with their twin objectives which stretch far beyond those of any one individual.)

(b) Zwingli's reformation work

To further illustrate the foregoing, let us examine the work of Ulrich Zwingli, the prime means of introducing the Reformation into German-speaking northern Switzerland.

He tasted the sweetness of the forgiveness of God through his frequent study of Scripture. He wrote,

“When Satan would frighten me, by crying out ‘You have not done this or that which God commands!’, forthwith the gentle voice of the Gospel consoles me by saying ‘That thou canst not do - and certainly thou canst do nothing Christ has done perfectly’. Yes, when my heart is troubled because of my helplessness and the weakness of my flesh, my spirit is revived at the sound of the glad tidings, Christ is thy sanctification! Christ is thy righteousness! Christ is thy salvation! Thou art nothing, thou canst do nothing! Christ is the Alpha and Omega; Christ is the first and the last; Christ is all things; He can do all things. All created things will forsake and deceive thee, but Christ, the holy and righteous One will receive and justify thee ...”

Like Luther, he first tried to preach the truth within the framework of the Roman Church. He studied theology and was appointed preacher in several different places. Wherever he went, the finished work of Christ and the sole authority of the Scriptures were his constant themes. Such preaching provoked inevitable opposition from those who were of the spirit of Rome, and in 1520 he resigned all connection with the Papacy.

Despite this, his continued ministry in the city and district of Zurich produced great effect. Disobedience to Roman traditions arose, and in 1522 the City Council virtually took control of matters of religious doctrine and practice from the Catholic archbishop. The sole authority of the Scriptures was allowed to decide all questions. Over the next few years Zwingli’s preaching was accepted and enforced by the Zurich authorities. Priests and nuns married, the abomination of the mass was abolished, idolatrous images and relics were done away, monastic establishments closed down, and the characteristic doctrines and ceremonies of Roman worship discarded.

(c) *Luther and Zwingli*

Zwingli’s reforming work was in many ways far deeper than that of Luther. The former was much more liberated from respect for the traditions of the past. Whilst Luther desired to maintain all that was not expressly forbidden by the Word, Zwingli boldly maintained the abolition of all that was not specifically found there. Hence Lutheranism continued in many respects bound to the Roman traditions of the past. Luther wished to remain united to Rome and would have been content to purify it of all opposed to the Word.

A good illustration of this difference lies in their sharp disagreement over the Lord’s supper. Whilst rejecting the Roman blasphemy that it was a sacrifice, or that the elements should be worshipped, Luther maintained that the body of Christ was actually present and received by the communicant. Zwingli, however, taught that it was purely a memorial, though faith was necessary to appropriate its benefits.

(d) *Church-State union*

Despite his desire to return wholly to the Word, Zwingli and his Swiss co-workers fell short in certain major respects. These contained the seeds of the destruction of much that they had achieved.

The sober words of Paul to the Galatians fit Zwingli as much as the other principal Reformers:

Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit are ye now made perfect by the flesh? ... But now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, HOW TURN YE BACK to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? (Gal 3:3; 4:9)

Zwingli began well. The foundation of Christ our righteousness was laid. But he failed to complete the work. Christ was not presented as all in everything. In Church government Zwingli went even further than Luther in uniting Church and State. The reason he gave was the Old Testament principle of the civil ruler enforcing the Law of God as in Israel. Although this was the mind of God for that time, under the new covenant this no longer holds.

(It is no coincidence that godly men throughout the Reformation looked to the OLD Testament to justify their recourse to the State to enforce or protect their teachings. It is part and parcel of the purpose of the spirit of antichrist to prevent a full return of the Church to her new covenant birthright. In the Pergamos age there was a slipping back to the *beggarly* elements as the means of attaining holiness [See *study No 5, pp 33-34*]. There was also a return to Old Testament principles in the government of the Church. When the tide turned, and God's grand restoration plan began to gather momentum in the Sardis age, though the serpent failed to side-track the Reformers from the foundation truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation, he succeeded when it came to Church government and other matters. All the most well known groups again joined Church and State. And they justified it by reference to the old covenant: i.e. the *beggarly* elements. It did not just "happen" that the Reformers failed on this point. This issue was central to the whole restoration plan and an essential part of the devil's counter-strategy. The Reformers had become entangled once more in the yoke of bondage. They had failed *to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free (Gal 5:1).*)

As already seen, Luther agreed to the princes' assuming control over ecclesiastical and spiritual affairs. Zwingli went even further and reaped the awful consequences.

With his support, the magistrates of the Swiss cantons usurped control of the government of the Church. Citizens were forbidden by law from attending mass, and ordered to attend the Reformed services. Dissenters were banished. Attempts were also made to enforce standards of Christian holiness by law. Although civil governments have a legitimate right to protect public morality, these attempts were built on the false premise that the new life, which can only be imparted by regeneration, could be imposed by legislation.

If independent local churches had been allowed these would have established proper standards of holiness and only those truly born again would have joined. When the State acts as though it is the Church, it seeks to impose its authority and discipline by law. The mainline Reformers did not form assemblies of believers only. So, the desire of God to fully reveal His Son through His Body, the Church of the firstborn, could not be satisfied in their newly established ecclesiastical system.

Not only did Zwingli believe in the State's responsibility to control and enforce religious matters. He himself, a minister of the Gospel, also acted as a diplomat. He was blinded by the concept of a "Christian" State, as opposed to a State that contained Christians. For him the Church was a NATIONAL body. He therefore promoted a military alliance of "Christian" states to defend the Reformed teaching, and exhorted the Zurich Council to arms against Catholic cantons which martyred believers.

But from the time he meddled in political affairs, the Lord withdrew. Though Zwingli's motives were doubtless good, He could not walk with the arm of the flesh. When they went out to battle the Lord went not with them. A strange foreboding of doom settled upon Zwingli himself, whilst the Protestant rulers were smitten with an unaccustomed hesitancy in their dealings with the Catholic cantons. Their judicial blindness culminated in the battle of Cappel (1531). The Catholic forces destroyed the Protestant army. Among those slain was Ulrich Zwingli, still clutching his musket, a solemn testimony to the words of our Lord: *all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword.* (Matt 26:52).

Henceforth the Reformation advanced no further in German Switzerland. Carnal-minded Protestant theologians have viewed Zwingli's political work as his greatest claim to glory. In fact it was his downfall.

(e) Zwingli and the Anabaptists

It is often thought that Reformation Europe was simply divided into Catholics and Protestants. Many believers disassociated themselves from both these, however, forming local assemblies independent of episcopal or state control.

So numerous were these that the two State-Church groups, fearing for their own power and existence, almost succeeded in destroying them by the relentless use of civil power.

Although it is understandable that Rome should seek to quench their testimony to the Truth, why would Protestants also do so?

Because Protestantism was never delivered from the spirit of denomination. Rome may be the great mother whore (Rev 17:5), but she has daughters. They also were harlots. The new-born Protestant organisations were those daughters. And they bore her traits. As is the mother, so is her daughter (Ezk 16:44).

Doubtless the Reformers failed to appreciate the ugly depths of the spirit they allowed in when they continued the old Catholic Church-State union. This evil spirit is like that of the beast that came out of the earth (Rev 13:11). Though its appearance is that of a harmless innocent lamb, when it speaks it is as a dragon. Few appreciate the evil of the spirit of denomination. Many fine godly people touch it, little realising the unclean depths that lie within it.

These independents are usually called "Anabaptists" (= Rebaptisers) as they denied the validity of infant baptism and baptised believers only. Whereas the mainline Reformers fell short, these were the pioneers. Though not effecting a complete restoration, they nonetheless were in the vanguard, and termed the others half-way reformers. They suffered dearly for their testimony. Their leaders and many followers were martyred all over Europe. Yet they continued to spread.

The Anabaptists clashed with Zwingli in almost identical circumstances to those of Luther. They were very active in Zurich, and established independent assemblies, baptising believers and separating from the world. In 1525, the Town Council forbade believers' baptism and ordered all who had not done so to have their children baptised within eight days. In 1526, they ordered Anabaptists drowned. Wherever they fled in Protestant Switzerland, execution, banishment and beating followed. Many scattered throughout Austria, Moravia and South Germany, preaching wherever they went.

Zwingli opposed them with much bitterness. He spurred on the civil authorities to stamp out the pioneering rival Church. They were a constant reminder of how he had gone back on his own earlier words. And, like Asa, Zwingli sought to oppress those who reminded him of his disobedience.

Like Luther, the greatest tragedy of Zwingli's opposition to the Anabaptists was that he also went back on what he himself once believed. In his earlier years Zwingli's idea of reformation had been restoration to the simplicity of the early Church, completely bypassing the Middle Ages. He had had close relations with the Anabaptists and openly acknowledged that christening was unscriptural.

But Zwingli hesitated to take a clear stand with those who opposed it, fearing the displeasure of the civil authorities. His earlier ideas of freedom of conscience disappeared. His concept of the nature of the Church also altered. He began to teach that the whole population of a "Christian" state belonged to the Church, just as in Israel of old all were considered part of the national religion. As a result his understanding of baptism changed. It was no longer a sign of newness of life for regenerated believers only. It was a symbol of belonging to a "Christian" State, just as circumcision was a sign of being an Israelite. His concept of the Church was now a Christianised Jewish theocracy. He had returned to *THE BEGGARLY ELEMENTS* of the old covenant. Zwingli taught the magistrate was necessary for the perfecting of the Body; without one, it is mutilated. Yet the Bible says it was the ministries of Ephesians 4:11-13 that were given for the perfecting of the Body.

This then is the root of the conflict between Zwingli (and the other Reformers) and the Anabaptists over believers baptism. It is whether the Church was to be understood in terms of the Israel of the old covenant, or as living under the better things of the new.

Because Zwingli hesitated and drew back from earlier light, he was judicially blinded. The serpent wished to hold the Church back from a full revelation and restoration of the ministration of the new covenant, and of the Spirit which gives liberty and restores man to the image and glory of God. In Reformation theology the vision of the New Testament Church was never recovered.

Zwingli went back to the medieval understanding of the Church, which was simply an attempt to reproduce the situation in Israel under the monarchy. The Law of Moses was to be enforced upon all those born in the nation, and all were to be marked with the sign of circumcision. Heresy and blasphemy were to be punished by death.

But the old covenant has been abolished, *for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof* (Heb 7:18). Christ has now brought in a better covenant established on better promises.

Thus the opportunity of regaining the glorious vision of a New Testament Church was lost. Baptism only became an issue since under an Old Testament system all the nation must be christened. In a true church only believers could be baptised. Oh *beggarly elements!* How far was there yet to go to taste the fulness of the liberty of Christ.

But the Word of the Lord holds firm. He *Who worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will* (Eph 1:11) will not be frustrated. The mystery of God SHALL be brought to completion.

In conclusion, Zwingli failed to recover the full New Testament vision. This, however, was not just the failure of one individual, it was the same with all the chief Reformers. Though the Anabaptists sought to go further, even they did not attain a full restoration.

ii) John Calvin and Geneva

(a) Misunderstanding of the relationship between Church and State

One of the most famous and influential Reformers is John Calvin (1509—1564). His ministry led to the formation of the Reformed (Presbyterian) Churches of Switzerland, Holland, France and Scotland.

It is not my intention to give a detailed description of his life and work, but only to illustrate the common Reformation failure to return to the full Biblical vision of the calling of the Church.

The doctrines of the Reformation had left their mark on Geneva before Calvin arrived in 1536. Converts began to meet in homes for Bible study and prayer, with liberty of ministry. Although rioting was provoked among the predominantly Catholic populace when these converts met to break bread. Geneva soon accepted the Reformed faith.

But practices were soon introduced which were just as unscriptural as some of the former Catholic ones.

In 1536 Calvin published his famous work “The Institutes of the Christian Religion”. This comprised his teaching on doctrine, discipline and ecclesiastical organisation. As a result he was acknowledged as the foremost theologian of his day. Soon after he was asked to settle in Geneva to help establish the work of the Reformation there. With the exception of three years in exile, he spent the rest of his life there, imposing his ideal of a State and Church organised largely on the Old Testament pattern.

Calvin did not undertake the sharp doctrinal about-turn seen in Luther and Zwingli. He did, however, acknowledge to a visiting Bohemian Anabaptist that he was at one time a Waldensian (one of the medieval protest groups resisting the teachings of Rome, of whom the Anabaptists were in many ways the spiritual heirs). Indeed Olivetan, who first introduced Calvin to the Truth, was active in the Waldensian Church, and was even thought to have been one of their pastors.

Calvin’s career began after the dividing lines had been drawn between the early Reformers and the Anabaptists. Although he did not turn back from earlier revelation like the earlier Reformers, Calvin still made the wrong choice in the division between Anabaptists and mainline Reformers.

On the central point of the parting of the ways, the nature of the Church, Calvin sided with those who went back to much of the *beggarly elements* of the medieval Catholic system. In common with the other Reformers,

“Calvin’s doctrine of the Church was a composite of many and diverse and inconsistent elements. Because of this, confusion concerning the meaning, the place and the purpose of the Church has reigned almost everywhere in the Reformed wing of Protestantism” (A C McGiffert, *Calvin’s Theory of the Church*).

This confusing inconsistency and dualism is seen in how at one time he describes the Church in terms readily recognisable by Free Church believers, and at others in terms such as would be employed by Established (State) Church adherents.

So confused was he that he opposed the Anabaptist 1527 Schleithem definition of the Church as: "a fellowship of the saints, namely, of all believing and regenerate Christians and children of God, born from above by the Word and the Spirit". Calvin's own weak definition was, "that mass among whom the Word of God is purely preached and the sacraments administered ... "

These two definitions sum up the dispute between Anabaptists and mainline Reformers. The latter could not rid their minds of the idea of a "Christian State" with an official State religion as in Catholic medieval Europe.

Another instance of Calvin's being caught between the Anabaptist Free Church view, and the old Catholic Church-State union is the matter of believers' life-styles.

Of all the Reformers, Calvin most insisted upon the exercise of church discipline and fitness to partake of the Lord's table. Despite this, contesting the Anabaptist view of the Church as comprised of believers and them only, he echoed much of the old Catholic thought patterns when he wrote,

"we must think so highly of the Word and the sacraments that wherever we see them we are to conclude without a doubt that the Church is there, regardless of how much vice and evil there may be in the corporate life of men".

This is no more than the old superstitious idea of virtue being inherent in the mere exercise of certain sacraments.

In the battle between the Free Church and State-Church concepts, Calvin came down firmly in favour of the latter.

For him, civil governments should cherish and support public worship, preserve purity of doctrine, and defend the constitution of the Church. So far was he from being able to find any New Testament justification for this error that he was reduced to quoting 1 Corinthians 12:21, claiming that the State was one of the members of the Body of Christ! Challenged by the Anabaptists to prove that civil governments should be involved in Church affairs, he claimed the *governments* of 1 Corinthians 12:28 referred to civil governments.

In view of his support for State involvement it is no surprise to find that Calvin spoke of the period before Constantine as an era "in which the dignity of the Church still lay hidden".

Surely this epitomises our sub-title, "Reformation or Restoration". The mainline Reformers abolished much that was evil, but in so many other respects they only turned men's eyes back to the Church at the beginning of the Pergamos age, not to her Ephesian *first love*.

Not only did Calvin stop at Pergamos, he explicitly taught that this was the correct place for the Church to be. He reproved evangelicals in the Low Countries, for example, who were content to meet privately instead of agitating for a public worship supported by the State. For him, private gatherings were an obstacle to the support of the princes.

As a logical outcome of these views, Calvin endorsed the contemporary view that the enforcing of the Church's teaching and dealing with heresy was the responsibility of the State and not simply of the local church, whose ultimate weapon is only excommunication.

Consistent with these principles, during the period of Calvin's residence in Geneva,

'the citizens were compelled to sign a confession of faith or to leave the city . . . The Churches which had begun to grow up in obedience to New Testament teaching almost disappeared in the general organisation, for papal rule was replaced by that of the Reformation, and liberty of conscience was still withheld' (E H Broadbent, p 224).

An example of enforced doctrinal conformity by appeal to government intervention took place when Bolsec rejected Calvin's view on predestination. The latter took this to the Council and with difficulty secured his banishment.

The ultimate and logical outcome of Calvin's Church-State doctrine was the burning of Servetus for heresy by the City Council. Though he disapproved of burning, Calvin was not opposed to the death penalty for heretics. He interceded with the Council that Servetus be beheaded rather than burnt, but not that he be spared. Indeed, he once wrote that he had no doubt that "had a pious and zealous Christian magistrate been at hand, Paul would willingly have delivered over Hymenaeus and Alexander to him, to receive the chastisement they deserved". He could not, of course, produce any New Testament evidence for such error.

(b) Calvin's form of Church government

Despite Calvin's confusion over the Scriptural concept of the Church, his doctrine was a significant improvement on Lutheranism and Anglicanism. Although he distinctly believed and taught State intervention in defending doctrine, Calvin tried harder to subject the State to the Church unlike Luther, for example, who tended to leave the regulation of Church government to the civil powers.

Especially after the Peasant's War of 1524, Luther looked increasingly to the German princes to conduct religious reform. When the first Lutheran churches were organised in 1526, he opposed congregational government. A proposal in Hesse for faithful communicants to govern the local churches, elect pastors and administer discipline was rejected on Luther's advice. Instead a Lutheran State-Church was organised. Nominees of the civil authorities inquired into clerical doctrine and conduct and held supreme administrative authority. A similar system spread to other Lutheran regions of Germany.

In contrast, Calvin strongly supported the Church's independence of the State in spiritual matters and the election of overseers by Church members. Unfortunately, Calvin was unable to secure all he wanted in Geneva. Instead of following the Anabaptists and founding independent local churches, however, he compromised with the City Council over their involvement in internal Church affairs.

In 1541 the Geneva authorities adapted Calvin's revised ecclesiastical constitution (the "Ordonnances"). Ministerial candidates were to be chosen by existing pastors, and appointed by the magistrates by the consent of the people (who only had right to veto). The elders, who were the heart of Calvin's system, were appointed by the City Council on the advice of the pastors. Pastors and elders together formed the consistory which was responsible for ecclesiastical

discipline. They could go as far as excommunication. Beyond that the case was to be referred to the civil authorities to impose penalties. All Geneva was continually under the detailed supervision of the Consistory.

Despite the following remarks, Calvin's opposition to the free-churchmen of his day betrayed the weakness of his understanding of the nature and calling of the Body of Christ:

"There is much in these Ordinances contrary to what Calvin had earlier taught ... about the freedom of Christian people to elect their own Church office-bearers. It is obvious that in many things Calvin did not get his own way in Geneva, and was not responsible for much that was done by the City Council and the Consistory" (*The Story of the Church*, A M Renwick, p 123).

The innate resentment of the Calvinistic presbyterian system of Church government to any religious rivals is seen wherever it has been able to gain the co-operation of the civil authorities.

In England, for example, Presbyterianism was briefly established as the State religion in 1646, during the Civil War. But it failed to reveal its full potential since rigid Presbyterianism was as distasteful to the army as the earlier (Anglican) rule of bishops. Given their own way, however, the Presbyterians would have enforced their rule as strictly as the earlier (Anglican) Episcopalians. Their argument was against certain aspects of Anglican doctrine. But it was not against the employment of the State to enforce religious policy.

Another land where Presbyterianism prevailed and revealed its true attitude towards the use of the State to enforce religious policy was Holland. Here the Dutch Reformed Church was established as the State religion. With the power of the civil authorities behind it, Calvin's teaching again reached its logical conclusion. Not only Catholics but Anabaptists were punished by fines, confiscation, exile, etc. Private (i.e. non State Church) meetings were banned by law. Opposition to free churches persisted in Holland even into modern times.

It can truly be said that Calvinism has only been an active force towards religious toleration and separation of Church and State when driven to it. Calvin did not condemn the Papacy so much for its intolerance, but because it had departed from true religion. As with Luther and Zwingli, he contributed little to the development of religious liberty.

Once the Church-State hybrid of Constantine was embraced, it behaved in exactly the same way all over again. Doubtless the Reformers little appreciated the evil spirit with which they were dealing. Yet the ecclesiastical systems they founded contained within them the same life as in the mother harlot. Like mother, like daughter.

The influence of Calvin's teaching extended far beyond Geneva. More than any other Reformer, he reduced to a systematic form the principal Protestant doctrines.

His pattern of Church government was widely adopted among Presbyterians, rejecting the strongly centralised episcopal control of Lutherans and Anglicans. The latter abolished the worst excesses of Nicolaitan ecclesiastical government by abolishing the rule of one man (the Pope) over all the churches and also loosening some of the bishops' control over the local churches. But presbyterian government was a further significant advance in the dismantling of the vast all-embracing Nicolaitan power structure built up over the centuries in the different branches of Christendom.

Though dismantling part of this structure, however, Presbyterianism still did not give the Holy Ghost full freedom in the assembly. It was a partial reformation of many abuses, but not a full restoration. A human constitution was introduced bearing much similarity to the emerging Nicolaitan system of the Smyrna age, which was cemented at the Nicene Council.

In Scotland and France, for example, four grades of power were established binding the local churches together: the local church session, district presbyteries, provincial synods and national (or, General) assemblies. Ultimately all were subject to the authority of the national assembly.

Since the overall system of presbyterian government was still marred by Nicolaitanism, it is not surprising that many of its details were also. For example,

- Calvin recommended no observance of the Lord's supper without duly recognised ministers. Where are such teachings in the Word? Even today such a question will jolt many a mind, so deeply ingrained are the concepts of Nicolaitanism in believers' thinking.
- He continued the concept of limiting ministers to a particular parish and insisting on officially controlled ordination. This was a regular hindrance in the 17th C evangelical awakenings. Wesley and Whitfield, for example, were continually dogged by it.
- Calvin also continued set liturgies and prayers. These are always found where the life of the Spirit is deficient among Church members as contrasted with the normal New Testament meeting described in 1 Corinthians 14. Happily, however, Calvin's system was an improvement on the rigidity of the Lutheran and Anglican liturgies, with some scope given for spontaneous prayer. (Believe it or not, Wesley found it necessary to justify spontaneous prayer to the ecclesiastics of his day.) In view of the absence of supernatural, Spirit-led worship, no wonder Calvin's extremely meagre references to 1 Corinthians 14 in his writings on the Church and its government are so completely lacking in Biblical understanding.

Let us conclude. Of the three major divisions of the mainline Reformation, Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed (or, Presbyterian), the latter owed its inspiration to Calvin, and was the one most cleansed of the accumulated doctrinal debris of the Catholic system. Calvin was the most truly international of the Reformers. His influence stretched far beyond Geneva to the English Puritans, Scotland, France, Holland and Hungary. He helped spread the evangelical faith far and wide, both through his writings and the college in Geneva.

Whilst not progressing as far as the Anabaptists in their return to the full counsel of God, he nonetheless advanced beyond the limited reforms of Anglicanism and Lutheranism.

Like the latter, however, the concept and characteristics of the medieval Church-State union were so intermingled in Calvin's teaching on the Church as to deprive him of the support of a substantial body of godly believers. These were the ones who had so rejoiced over the first signs of the Reformation, with bright hopes of a full restitution of the Spirit and practice of the early Church. Calvin's opposition to them must have cost him dear in terms of Spiritual power. The Lord must honour they who most closely seek to adhere to His Word, and respond to the light He gives.

THE REFORMATION IN ENGLAND

I wish to conclude our historical survey of the Reformation by briefly examining its progress in our own land. This should explain the origin of other major denominations whose influence has spread worldwide: Anglican (or, Episcopalian), Congregational and Baptist.

(a) The Church of England: General Introduction

Of all the denominations arising from the Reformation, the Church of England remained closest in its form of ecclesiastical government and doctrine to the medieval Catholic pattern. It is most closely modelled on the old State-Church, and continues the heavy Nicolaitan emphasis on the "sacraments" to impart grace.

Indeed, of all the Reformation movements, the word "Protestant" sits most loosely on Anglicanism. In the line of succession of escape from the pit of Romanism, the Anglicans would be lowest, followed in ascending order by the Lutheran, Reformed and Free Church groups (Independents or Congregationalists, Baptists and Anabaptists). Even today the broad overall terms used to divide Christendom are Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant. Note how the last two are separately listed.

It is no coincidence that in contemporary denominational unity moves, much of the pull in Anglicanism is backward to Rome. The Anglican system sits better with Rome than the Nonconformist or Free Churches. (It is significant that, when asked why he didn't join the Episcopal (= Anglican) Church when he left Rome, Chiniquy, the former Catholic priest, replied that this Church had too many doctrines like Rome.)

The reason for this is found in the historical origins of the Church of England.

(b) Henry VIII and the abolition of Papal Control

Before the Reformation proper, many in Britain had taught the doctrine of salvation despite ecclesiastical and political hostility.

In 1531 Henry VIII quarrelled with Rome (for no spiritual reason) and made himself supreme head of the Church of England in place of the Pope. All payments to Rome were discontinued; new ecclesiastical laws required the royal consent; bishops were nominated by the king.

Despite the overthrow of papal power, Henry had no intention of advancing the Reformation. He knew nothing of the new birth. His use of the State to overthrow papal power cannot be compared with Luther, Zwingli and Calvin. The latter were godly men who became enmeshed in the toils of the system they sought to leave. Henry was not even a Christian. Although taking supremacy over the Church of England, Henry made it plain he had no intention of varying the articles of the Catholic faith. The Nicolaitan clergy continued as before except that Henry re-

placed the Pope as head. They and the king agreed to imprison and burn heretics. Catholics suffered as traitors; reformers and Anabaptists as heretics. Thousands were executed.

Although papal control and the monasteries were abolished, Henry condemned to death all opposing transubstantiation, auricular confession, private masses, and the celibacy of the clergy. Having no personal experience of the power of the cleansing Blood, he spent large sums for masses for the repose of his soul. Even after his fullest concessions to Protestantism, he still taught penance, the need for absolution and works in justification, prayers to the saints and the honouring of images.

(c) Edward VI and the reformation of the Church of England

After the death of Henry in 1547, the Reformation was effected in the Church of England leaving it in all essential points in the form in which we find it today.

During Edward VI's reign, images were removed, prayers for the dead abolished, auricular confession and transubstantiation declared unscriptural and the clergy allowed to marry. The essence of the famous 39 Articles and the Book of Common Prayer were formulated.

As on the Continent, the civil power was used to bring about Reform. To this day the Church of England is tied to the State in ways wholly incompatible with the New Testament. Bishops are appointed by the Prime Minister, for example, and changes to the Prayer Book require Parliamentary approval. How would the early apostles have managed!

(d) The Church of England from 1558—1642

In keeping with the spirit of its Nicolaitan Church-State predecessor, the new ecclesiastical structure in England soon began to persecute those dissenting from it just as the earlier papal system.

Even fine men fail to appreciate the ugly depths of the spirit lurking behind and inspiring this system, and embrace it in all good faith. But its true heart is laid bare by its fruits. Whilst none sunk to the depths of the great mother harlot, the new denominational structures rising in Protestant lands bore many of her characteristics.

Just as on the Continent the Anabaptists were opposed, so it was in England with those groups that sought to go into further light. To hold public office it was necessary to be in good standing with the "right" church. If a man was excommunicated, all were forbidden to buy or sell to him. (Note the similarity to the final and fullest manifestation of this spirit in Revelation 13.) Imprisonment or banishment faced those who would not conform to the official Church of England.

The ecclesiastical policies of Elizabeth I retained much error. Whilst having no intention of restoring papal rule, she had a strong leaning to Romish ceremonies.

A party rose up, called Puritans, strongly objecting to the use of special robes for the clergy, and seeking a simpler style of worship than the highly standardised rituals of Anglicanism. Elizabeth, however, insisted on exact uniformity in rites and ceremonies. Immediate uniformity in vestments was insisted upon on pain of prohibition from preaching and loss of office. Those

who refused (often called Nonconformists) withdrew from the Church of England which they regarded as only half reformed.

Although it may seem strange that such dissension centred on so minor a matter as robes, a major spiritual principle was involved. For the spirit of antichrist, robes were part of the whole Nicolaitan system separating the clergy from the laity.

To those who read Church history intellectually instead of by the discerning of those spirits at work at any given time, it seems excessive and uncompromising to fight so stubbornly for such a minor detail. If only the veil could be lifted from the spiritual world, it would be seen that at that moment, the battlefield centred on clerical vestments. On another occasion such a matter would not arouse such controversy for the battlefield would have moved on. Beware of an intellectual broad-mindedness devoid of Spiritual discernment!

The Puritans attempted to work within the framework of the Church of England, resisting all that was Romish and endeavouring to make it more definitely Protestant. Some later Puritans, however, sought a presbyterian system of church government instead of the episcopalian (which is basically the Catholic system without a pope). Although Presbyterianism became the established religion of Scotland, no such thing was allowed in England. A Presbyterian church in Wandsworth, for instance, was dispersed in 1572.

It must be remembered, however, that not only Anglicans (or, Episcopalians) but also Presbyterians supported State interference in religious affairs wherever conditions permitted. Even where they were unable to benefit from State support, however, their form of government still contained much of the Nicolaitan organisational structure designed to remove the Holy Ghost from the control of the assemblies.

Though the Puritans and Presbyterians suffered much at the hands of the authorities, the greatest persecution was encountered by those groups who separated from the semi-reformed Church of England in search of a fuller restoration of Truth.

These groups came to be known as Independents (or, Congregationalists) and Baptists. They were in many ways to the Anglicans what the Anabaptists were to the continental Reformers. Both believed in independent local churches of believers, but the Baptists baptised believers only, whilst the Independents baptised infants, one of whose parents was a believer.

Relentless persecution was directed against both. Death was prescribed for reading certain of their writings. Some of the leaders were hanged. The prisons, which were indescribable, were crowded with them, and many perished there. Banishment became increasingly common. Many fled to Holland for refuge.

This persecution provoked the famous sailing of the "Pilgrim Fathers" in the "Mayflower" for the New World in 1620. The parting words of their leader, John Robinson, deserve to be graven with an iron pen in the creed books and constitutions of every new movement which arose as God progressively restored His Word to His people. Had they been heeded, the scourge of denominationalism, which cannot advance beyond its own light, would have been avoided:

"I charge you before God and His blessed angels, that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveals anything to you by any other instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as you were to receive any truth by my

ministry, for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His holy Word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of those reformed Churches which are come to a full stop in religion, and will go, at present, no further than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of His will our God has revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it; and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented, for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God; but were they now living, would be as willing to embrace further light as that which they first received, for it is not possible the Christian world should come so lately out of such thick anti-Christian darkness and that perfection of knowledge should break forth at once.'

How well this sums up the shortcomings of the Reformation, as well as of succeeding years.

(e) The Civil War, Oliver Cromwell and the Commonwealth

A great change took place with the commencement of the Civil War in 1642.

Charles I was executed and the Commonwealth established under Cromwell. As the King had been supported by the bishops, Parliament discussed forming a new National Church. The Presbyterian form was suggested. The Presbyterians insisted this be imposed on all, with severe penalties for refusal. Other sects were to be extinguished. The Independents protested in vain, whilst the Baptists (considered even worse as they had gone furthest in the return to the original Word) were not even consulted.

Here again we see the danger of allowing a Nicolaitan clerical organisation access to the power of the State. No sooner were the Presbyterians freed from the oppression of the Episcopalian Church of England than they in turn wanted to enforce their own system on others.

In the event these proposals were not enforced. A brief period of relative freedom of conscience was permitted (except for the Quakers) until the restoration of the monarchy.

At the restoration, the Act of Uniformity (1662) re-enforced the earlier episcopalian government of the Church of England and again severely punished dissent. Although this severity greatly diminished after the publication of the "Bill of Rights" in 1689, an unremitting conflict between the Church of England and Nonconformists continued far into the 19th C until little by little dissenters obtained equal rights as citizens.

Thus we find the same pattern seen on the Continent appearing also in England.

The pattern was identical since the mastermind spirit at work all over Europe was identical. To grasp this principle is to understand the true inspiration of outward historical events.

5 THE REFORMATION: AN UNFULFILLED WORK

(a) Introduction

We have now completed an outline of the origin of the three major Reformation denominations: Lutheran, Anglican (or, Episcopalian) and Calvinist (Presbyterian, or Reformed).

I trust that abundant proof has been given to substantiate my claim that the Reformation was only a partial work and failed to bring to completion the work begun. Luther and Zwingli in particular not only failed to go on, but in a marked way, noted by many historians, actually went back on their own clearly held and acknowledged earlier beliefs. Although there is not the same back-tracking by Calvin, yet he also chose the lesser way in the division which occurred early in the ranks of the Reformers.

For far too long many other godly brethren who were an inseparable part of the continental Reformation have not been given their due. These, usually called Anabaptists, were as much a part of the Reformation as Luther, Zwingli, Calvin and the other famous names (Melanchthon, Bucer, Beza, etc).

They generally shared the same fundamental beliefs as the Reformers, such as justification by faith alone, and the appeal to Scripture as the sole authority in matters of faith. Indeed, they insisted even more than their more famous contemporaries on the principle of "Sola Scriptura". After Zwingli's pronounced early emphasis on the authority of the New Testament ceased from 1525 on, they opposed him when by "special revelation" he permitted the Zurich Council (instead of the Scripture) to decide on the question of the mass.

Anabaptism was not a separate movement running parallel with the Reformation. It was part and parcel of the Reformation. It stayed true to the original Reformation principle of looking to the Word as sole authority when the early Reformers veered from the New Testament pattern.

Let there be no mistake about it. It was the Reformers not the Anabaptists who separated from the first principles.

For centuries the Anabaptists (usually because of the writings of the Reformers) were considered a very extreme and unsound group. Calvinists often unfairly equated the Anabaptist Reformers with rationalists and libertines. They were also lumped together with such unhappy bedfellows as the Zwickau prophets and Thomas Muntzer (see next chapter). Recent discoveries, however, show how the early Anabaptist Brethren upbraided Muntzer for the same reason as Zwingli: his failure to be governed only by the New Testament.

Although continental Anabaptism did not effect a full restoration, its Spiritual strength lay in its pressing on whereas the mainline Reformers drew back from God-given light (Luther and Zwingli) or contented themselves with accepting a lesser way (Calvin) after the main dividing issue of the nature of the Church had been clarified.

Anglicanism was very similar to semi-reformed Lutheranism. Just as Calvin's doctrine was an improvement on Luther's, the Calvinistic Puritans sought a fuller reformation of the Church of England. Like Calvin, however, the Puritans could not grasp the Free Church principle. So other groups, called Independents (or, Congregationalists), gradually arose in England seeking a progressively fuller return to the principles of Scripture.

Let us now list the most important areas where the teaching and practice of the continental (Anabaptist) Brethren differed from the better known Reformers.

This will illustrate clearly the relevance to the Reformation period of our Lord's warning to the church at Sardis.

(b) The crux of the matter: the nature of the Church

A misunderstanding of the nature of the Church was at the very heart of the Reformers' failure. Furthermore, this basic misconception was the source of their other shortcomings.

In brief the Anabaptists viewed the Church as part of, but separate from, society, whilst the Reformers treated it as though it were coextensive with society. To the modern evangelical, the latter view is virtually incomprehensible. Its origin was the medieval Catholic concept of a united Church and State with one "official" religion enforced on the whole population.

The mental conflict of the early Reformers (especially Luther, Melancthon, Zwingli and Bucer) was between a full return to the Biblical pattern of independent local gatherings of believers and the Catholic Nicolaitan ecclesiastical structure. The tragedy is that they chose the latter, and that in doing so they went back on their own earlier convictions and statements. This was not simply a failure to take the reform far enough. It was a drawing back from God-given light.

The early Reformers all had early and later phases. When they went back on their former views the different Anabaptist groups, variously known as Swiss Brethren, Mennonites, Bohemian Brethren, etc, parted company with them. Consequently, though laying the solid foundation of an individual believer's justification by faith, the Reformers failed to restore the proper structure for the united fellowship of such justified individuals.

Zwingli, for example, in his earlier days had close links with the Swiss Brethren. He stated clearly that infant "baptism" was unscriptural. But he accepted the new (Protestant) State-Church union and the Zurich City Council's view that all religious reforms had to be confirmed by them. He thus handed over the government of the Church to the civil authorities. The Brethren would not accept this, and they separated. Zwingli then went even further than Luther or Calvin. He not only accepted State action against "heresy" (i.e. disagreeing with the official religion) by prison and even death. He all but became a diplomat himself.

Even sadder is the case of our brother Martin Luther.

Only after much hesitation did he oppose any attempt to put into practice his own initial beliefs on the liberty of the Christian congregation. Luther looked first to the secular powers for protection, then agreed to their full control over ecclesiastical and spiritual affairs. The original constitution of the Lutheran churches was basically the Catholic episcopal one, without a Pope. The concept of the Church as the Body of Christ was lost. Though he considered the early form

of Lutheran churches as provisional, once put under the authority of the German civil authorities Luther lost control. He frequently regretted lost liberty that had once been his aim.

Luther stopped short of a full restoration, halfway between the New Testament and the fully-fledged Nicolaitanism of Rome. The consistent Anabaptist charge was that the Reformers began well but went back to the medieval pattern. Once the Reformers decided on territorial churches controlled by the political rulers, the Anabaptists withdrew.

A second adulterous Church-State marriage had taken place, this time a Protestant one. And it bore the same fruit: persecution of non-conformity to the official religion.

Not only did the Lutherans wish the Catholics to be suppressed in Germany, for example. They also sought to ban Calvinists. Calvin likewise taught that civil rulers have a duty to purge the Church of offences by punishment and coercion. In fact, his friend Beza even said that Constantine did not go far enough in using State power to enforce the official religion. His fellow Dutchman, Bogerman, referred to this when he wished to oppress those not conforming to the national (Calvinistic) Dutch-Reformed Church. Edicts were issued forbidding non-Reformed church meetings, whether Catholics or Anabaptist.

The only significant group to resist this backsliding into the pit whence they had been delivered were the Anabaptists. They:

“became the first advocates in the modern era of the disestablishment of the Church. They alone among the 16th C evangelicals made the break with the medieval pattern of Church establishment. This even Calvin did not do” (Wm Estep, *The Anabaptist Story*, pp 196-7).

The Anabaptists dated the fall of the Church from the Church-State union of Constantine. The Reformers, however, saw this union through Augustine’s eyes, and dated the fall much later, after the rise of the papacy proper. Their revolt was against the abuse of papal power, not against the Catholic Nicolaitan system as such. They wished to reform the old structure of its many abuses, but not to replace it. The Anabaptists, on the other hand, sought to re-establish the Church on its original Biblical foundation. They (rightly) viewed the Reformers as only halfway reformers.

So, the mainline Reformers merely took the Church back to the Church-State union of Constantine. Even Calvin, who fought most for the independence of the Church in its own sphere, saw the Old Testament theocracy as his ideal.

And herein lies the essence of the failure of the Reformation. Instead of restoring the fulness of Christ, it merely took men back to the *beggarly elements* of an OLD covenant that lacked the power to bring to perfection.

When we examine the failure to re-establish Scriptural holiness, we shall find a similar pattern.

(c) Continued Nicolaitan clerical control

As a result of the failure to return to the New Testament principle of independent local churches, a large part of the Catholic Nicolaitan system was carried over into Protestantism.

The situation was not identical in the three main Reformation denominations:

- All repudiated the fullest development of the Nicolaitan spirit: one man (the Pope) over all the churches.
- The Lutheran and Anglican systems returned to a system similar to the early Middle Ages when bishops or archbishops controlled all religious affairs. As in the Greek Orthodox Church, the State was able to intervene greatly in church government, as well as in doctrinal and liturgical matters.
- The Reformed (Presbyterian) Churches made better progress in that where possible State interference was resisted (although State help in enforcing their views was actively sought). The Nicolaitan grip was further weakened by a presbyterian system of government rather than an episcopalian one.

So, the Nicolaitan structure was preserved, this time in a Protestant garb. The power of the clergy to control the laity remained strongly entrenched, particularly if State aid was available.

All the Reformers feared anything associated with free-churchmanship. Private gatherings outside “sacred” buildings were persecuted. Meetings were only permitted in official State Churches. In some cases attendance at official meetings was even legally enforced. Only those with a “call” authorised by the civil powers were permitted to preach in each “parish”. Philip of Hesse banished “uncalled” preachers on pain of death. Luther said they were in no way to be tolerated and should be consigned to the hangman. How tragic when we remember he once spoke of his ambition to assemble true believers behind closed doors, adding that he was not courageous enough to make such a beginning.

The Reformers even attempted to spread Nicolaitanism among the pre-Reformation Waldensian evangelicals. Calvin sought to induce them to institute a public (i.e. State) worship instead of believers simply meeting together as they had, so as to persuade the secular powers to come to their assistance.

Clerical power was such that much of the Catholic attitude to the so-called sacraments was carried over into the emerging Protestant movements.

Laymen were not permitted to baptise, preach or administer the Lord’s supper. Whilst most Reformation groups were of the view that salvation comes through receiving the Word, the superstitious idea continued of the supposed power of the sacraments to impart grace merely by their external application. This grew progressively stronger over the years as the backsliding grew more pronounced, especially amongst Episcopalians.

No Reformation body so cleanly escaped the Nicolaitan pit as the Anabaptists. They stressed the independence of the local assembly and congregational rule with the members electing their pastors. No outside control was allowed over the local congregations except among Hutterites and reorganised Mennonites. Anabaptists were generally intolerant of an unbiblical clergy-laity distinction. Although they had elders, laymen would baptise when necessary.

Yet, although the Anabaptists went far, even they did not taste the fulness of Christ’s authority over His Body through the complete range of gifts described in Ephesians 4. It was not only the mainline Reformers who thought the ministry of apostle and prophet had terminated.

Nonetheless the Anabaptists did at least seek to go forward. They were not guilty of the conscious backtracking of the early Reformers. Their vision of a full restitution of all that had been lost to the Church inspired others to seek further.

(d) Believer's baptism

Here again we find the pattern of light on the Truth followed by a drawing back from that light:

- Zwingli also once forcefully expressed his revulsion to infant baptism. Later, however, he accepted the Zurich Council's insistence that all children be baptised.
- In the early days Bucer in Strasbourg did not separate from the fellowship of those who desired to abolish christening. Later a similar decree to Zurich was passed.
- Luther rashly decried all who said baptism was ineffective for an unbeliever. So far did he slip from his first light that he even wrote,

"There is not sufficient evidence from Scripture that one might justify the introduction of infant baptism... But no one may venture with a good conscience to reject or abandon infant baptism, which has for so long been practised'.

The Reformers attitude is consistent with why they rejected independent local churches i.e. a resorting to the *beggarly elements* of the OLD covenant for justification. Having accepted that the Church was to be governed like Israel of old, the Reformers came to see baptism simply as the new covenant equivalent of the old covenant circumcision. Like the latter, it was to be applied to the whole population of a "Christian" State, by force if necessary.

Rejection of light brings judicial consequences. By refusing their earlier God-given revelation of believers' baptism, the Reformers were blinded to such an extent that, despite their cardinal doctrine of justification by faith, some even moved back towards the former Roman error of baptismal regeneration. Bucer in Strasbourg, for example, wrote of the "sacrament of regeneration". Lutheranism also never shook off this concept. The culpable rejection of light and the return to the former medieval system led to a progressive slide back into the associated errors of that system. This was divine retribution. All too often this pattern is repeated: a refusal to walk in light leads to a falling back into darkness deeper even than which has been accepted.

Once again it was the Anabaptists who stood on the furthest frontier of advancing truth. Once again they did not themselves effect a perfect restoration. Although their very name (Rebaptisers) implies their insistence on baptising believers only, surprisingly their normal practice was not immersion, but the pouring of water on the head of the believer.

(e) Evangelism and missionary vision

As with all other failures of the Reformation, the notable lack of evangelism and missionary outreach in this age is a direct consequence of a misunderstanding of the nature of the Church.

The ideal to which the Reformers sought to return was not the apostolic Church, but the days of Constantine. Time and time again they refer back to Augustine's teaching that Constantine's

“conversion” fulfilled the prophecies of Christ’s ruling over all kings. The Church was thus understood in the terms of the Old Testament Israelite theocracy where the Law was enforced upon all by the civil rulers.

This State Church error meant that fellow citizens were considered as in some way Christians, in the same way as all Israelites were supposed to be heirs of the same promise. So the Reformers inherited the view that the missionary command expired at the end of the apostolic age. Zwingli’s successor, Bullinger, for example, considered the great commission binding only on the apostles. So strong was this view that, as well as teaching that apostles and prophets had no continuing role, Calvin also taught that even evangelists were not one of the normal ministry gifts of the risen Christ.

The Anabaptists alone, being freed from Protestant misconceptions, saw the need for evangelism, considering every believer a missionary. They travelled all over Europe in one of the most aggressive missionary movements since Constantine.

So little interest did the Reformers show in missions that the 16th and 17th C were extremely lacking in any such work. The State-Church concept led them to consider even the extremely limited work that was done as the responsibility of the State. Even this was often at the instigation of the (Lutheran) Pietists, who in many ways were 17th C heirs of certain of the Anabaptist teachings.

The blighting impact on believers’ minds of the failure of the Reformers to discard wholly the system from which they were delivered was very great. In 1792, nearly 300 years after the Reformation, William Carey still found it necessary to argue at great length “whether the commission given by our Lord to His disciples was still binding on us”.

It was not until Philadelphia, the age of the open door, that missionary work began in earnest, in the power of the Spirit and not the arm of the State.

(f) The Second Coming

The continued loss of a living sense of the Lord’s return was another fruit of merely going back to Constantine.

This doctrine is noticeably absent from Reformation preaching due to the general acceptance of Augustine’s view that, although the world would end one day, the Church had entered the millennium at Pentecost. The promises of Christ’s coming kingdom were said to be fulfilled by the adulterous Church-State union.

How amazing to see the many ramifications of the Reformers’ retreat from their early light. How very fitting are the words addressed to the Sardis age.

Although a belief in the literal reign of Christ for 1000 years on earth was held by most Christian writers of the first two centuries (e.g. Papias, Irenaeus, Barnabas, Hermas, Justin and Tertullian), by the time of the Reformation both Catholic and Protestant theologians had rejected this in favour of Augustine’s theories.

Generally speaking, there was a much greater consciousness among the Anabaptists of the Lord's return in glory, and His millennial reign. Indeed this was so strong in some that they were prepared to take up arms in an attempt to actually set up the Kingdom on earth. (This recurred in Cromwell's day among the radical Puritan "Fifth-Monarchy Men".) However, these were not representative of the Anabaptist movement as a whole. They were disowned by the majority for going back to the Old Testament for their pattern instead of the New. The common Reformation failing was at work even here.

(g) Sanctification

The Church-State union always leads to Balaamism: the mingling of the world and the Church.

The Reformers' return to the adulterous Church-State union meant that instead of gaining willing converts through evangelism, a particular denominational system was imposed upon a whole nation by state power, and dissenters were persecuted. Often baptism was forced upon all citizens, church attendance compelled and acceptance of a particular creed enforced.

No wonder then that worldliness was rampant in the newly founded Protestant churches. By imposing a national religion embracing the whole population and compelling their external support, the presence of large numbers with no experience of regeneration badly lowered Biblical standards. The New Testament pattern of congregations of believers only would have spared the Reformers many a heartache over the poor quality of many members and pastors.

Such remarks are not the unkind reflections of a critic. Luther himself acknowledged his reforms had done little to correct prevailing moral standards, but left conduct generally as before. He himself said it was as bad with the Lutherans as with the papists. His only justification of this situation was that he did not oppose the papists because of their conduct!

Of course, the Reformers did preach the need of an amended life. Without removing the root of the problem, however, they were fighting a losing battle. By embracing a new Church-State union they herded regenerate and unregenerate together under one roof. This system always militates against an experience of the sanctifying power of the Holy Ghost. There is a strong resistance to disciplining and disfellowshipping those whose lives call for such action (cp 1 Cor 5). The chief sin of medieval Catholicism was not evil living, but "heresy" i.e. disagreeing with the official religion and withdrawing from its communion to establish a separate congregation. So it was with the Reformers.

The Anabaptists were universally acknowledged to live the godliest lives of all professing believers in their day. They strongly opposed the lack of the fruits of repentance among the followers of the Reformers, and for this they were bitterly attacked. Even Calvin, who more than the earlier Reformers sought to effect improved living, specifically called those who withdrew from a "Christian society" (i.e. the national Church) devils (cp Matt 10:25). His argument reeks of Catholicism when he claims there is no forgiveness nor salvation for such, quoting Acts 4:12. This verse ascribes salvation to Christ, not to the Church! It is anti-Christian Rome that arrogates to the her Church the rights due only to the Saviour.

A standing witness against the Reformers is the fact that suspected Anabaptists were often released or sentenced on the lack or proof of changed lives. Even Bullinger spoke of those who

were wrongly called Anabaptists simply because of their aversion for sensuality and frivolity and reproof of sin and vice.

The difference between Anabaptists and Reformers lay in their understanding of salvation.

The Reformers stressed justification, i.e. our being declared legally righteous through the sacrifice of Christ. The Anabaptists, whilst in total agreement with this, also emphasised regeneration, i.e. a new life. If this was not in evidence, discipline was exercised, which involved exclusion from the Lord's supper.

Their pure lives and constant emphasis on repentance as well as faith caused the Reformers much unease. The best they could do was (unjustly) to accuse the Anabaptists of teaching sinless perfection. Far more just, however, was the Anabaptist retort that the Reformers had so opposed works without faith as to create a faith without works. It is not insignificant that Luther did not like the book of James.

More than the other Reformers, Calvin sought to improve moral standards.

His teaching on holiness greatly emphasised the Law as the guide of the Christian life. Works were not considered the basis but the proof of salvation. Faith brings salvation, but a salvation *unto good works* (Eph 2:10). The saved man should strive to fulfil the works of the Law as an expression of his desire to do the will of God. As a result of these teachings Calvinism has always been insistent on character. This is much to be commended. It was certainly an emphasis that was necessary among Protestants of that day.

The strict moral character produced by such teaching did, however, lack the full effects of the sanctification of the Spirit. Calvin's mind was more that of a legislator and a disciplinarian. The strong impression is conveyed that for Calvin the teachings of the new covenant were simply a revised edition of the old. There is no sense of the joyous freedom of Spirit that accompanies the experimental knowledge of the perfect *law of liberty* that prevailed in the Philadelphia age.

Although monks, nuns and external ascetic practices were abolished by the Reformers, the nature of holiness as a flow of the life of Christ, instead of a re-enactment of a moral code of laws, was not widely grasped in this age. The reason for the new covenant was the failure of the old, through the weakness of the flesh. It is the indwelling Holy Ghost that fulfils the righteousness of the Law, not the imposition of the letter of the Law. In other words, imparted righteousness not just imputed righteousness. It was the failure to appreciate this that led to attempts in places such as Geneva and England under Cromwell to overcome worldly living by legally enforcing puritanical standards. Such efforts were doomed to failure. They were based on a false premise.

So, in this area too the Reformers remained under *the beggarly elements*. There was no widespread flow and experience of the resurrection life of Christ.

(h) Conclusion

From the foregoing, it must now be obvious how applicable to the Reformation period are the words addressed to the Sardis church.

The restoration of the New Testament pattern, which began so hopefully, all too quickly veered sharply from its proper course. The key was the failure of the Reformers to hold fast to their early understanding of the nature and calling of the Church. They drew back to the medieval Catholic system, based on the Church-State union of Constantine, and to a growing Nicolaitan clerical dominion over the laity.

From then on the Reformers were no longer restoring a New Testament Church pattern. They were recreating the Church of the days of Constantine, albeit purged of many of the grossest errors of the Catholic system. Many rotten branches were cut off, but the corrupt root itself was not pulled up. As a direct result many other truths which could have been widely proclaimed were not only not restored, but distorted.

It was left to those varied and numerous groups collectively termed Anabaptists to maintain a testimony to the light first given to the early Reformers. Although the former certainly did not effect a full restoration, they were not guilty of the conscious about-turn and retreat of the mainline Reformers.

All that now remains is to consider something of the incidence of the ministry of the supernatural in this age.

This we shall now proceed to do.

THOU HAST A NAME THAT THOU LIVEST AND ART DEAD

(a) Introduction: An age lacking in Spiritual power

Although Revelation 3:2-3 may at first have seemed far from applicable to the Reformation period, I trust that by now their relevance is patently obvious.

I now wish to examine one further phrase In the Lord's address to the angel of the church in Sardis, which may seem even less applicable to the Reformation in view of the normal assessment of this age:

I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead. (Rev 3:1b)

The Reformation has a reputation as a period of great Spiritual life and activity. How is it possible, then, to say that it is dead?

The answer lies in the Biblical meaning of the terms "death" and "life". *It is the Spirit who gives life* (Jn 6:63, NASV). Strange though it may appear in view of the religious and political upheaval all over Europe after Luther's bold public protests, this age is lacking in deep Spiritual (as opposed to religious) power in many important respects.

For example, despite much religious activity, the manifestation of the Spirit was very limited. It was not until towards the end of the Reformation age that any significant examples are found. And they were not welcomed by the newly formed mainline Protestant denominations.

In addition to the absence of the gifts of the Spirit, both within the Church and to confirm the Word to the unbeliever, there was a remarkable lack of true Holy Ghost regeneration.

This may surprise the casual reader accustomed to reports of vast territories embracing the faith of the Reformers. But, as already shown, throughout this period religion and politics were inextricably mixed as a result of the Reformers' own doctrines. Faith was enforced upon a populace according to the wishes of their rulers.

No wonder the Reformers constantly had to bewail and make excuses for the Spiritual shallowness of so many of their parishioners. This shallowness was the direct fruit of their own doctrine. Even missionary work (when undertaken) was viewed as a State responsibility.

It is significant that Edwin Orr in his exhaustive list of Evangelical Awakenings has little of note to say about the Reformation. Referring to Puritan attempts to enforce righteousness in the days of Cromwell he wrote,

"... like various ventures before it, the Commonwealth failed because it relied more upon secular force than persuasion. In the 18th, 19th and 20th C, the revived evangelicals relearned an earlier method". (*Evangelical Awakenings in Southern Asia*, p x.)

The Reformers relied more upon the arm of the flesh rather than the power of the Spirit. It is no surprise therefore that their adherents so often lacked the Biblical signs of a genuine Spiritual rebirth.

It was not until Philadelphia that remarkable spontaneous outpourings of the Spirit began in earnest. That was the age of the great worldwide evangelical awakenings, and of the moving of the Breath of God to an extent never experienced in the Reformation. It carries a deeply satisfying sense of an ever-increasing measure of Spiritual life.

For the present, however, it is necessary to confine ourselves to the Reformation age.

I have already referred extensively to the Anabaptists. Generally speaking they experienced a far deeper Spiritual work than the Anglican, Lutheran or Reformed churches, both in regeneration and in their subsequent personal lives and missionary outreach.

Let us now look at those Reformation groups with evidences of Spiritual manifestation nearest to these described in the New Testament.

Firstly, however, I wish to review briefly the manifestation of the Spirit from the early Church to the Reformation.

(b) Ephesus & Smyrna

In this period there are glowing evidences of the manifestation of that original Life intended for the Church of the firstborn. For example,

- Dean Farrar refers to persecuted Christians in Rome singing and speaking in tongues.
- Irenaeus (who died early in the 3rd C) wrote: "I have also heard many brethren in the churches who, by the Spirit, speak in all kinds of tongues, and to the edification of others bring what is hid in man to light and reveal the secrets of God".
- Justin wrote of those "who, in the power of the Name of Jesus Christ, have healed many who were possessed of demons".

Even in the early days of the new covenant Church, however, Irenaeus wrote of these who mocked the gifts of the Spirit and renounced the Spirit of prophecy.

The gradual strangulation of the gifts and ministries of the Holy Ghost in the first three centuries was in direct proportion as the Nicolaitan spirit grew in strength.

(c) Pergamos & Thyatira

During the next 1200 years there is very little evidence of any true manifestation of the Spirit.

The increasing strengthening of the vast Nicolaitan harlot system speedily quenched all vestiges of the Headship of Christ over His Body. John Chrysostom, for example, a famous cleric of his day (born c 345-347 AD; died 407), wrote of tongues as one who feels the whole subject to be obscure.

By the end of the 4th C the general opinion was that the gifts were only for the foundation of the Church and were no longer necessary. (Nor has this thought yet left us.)

The patently supernatural gifts were lost. Genuine prophecy, tongues and healings virtually disappeared. So did the ministry of apostles and prophets, and a living expectation of the return of Christ in power and glory. Baptism in the Holy Ghost was confused with water baptism.

As the supernatural Headship and direction of the Church through Christ was virtually extinguished in the long dreary Middle Ages, there began to rise concurrently in the semi-paganised post Constantine Church an ever growing volume of counterfeit miracles.

These bore no resemblance to the supernatural ministry of the Acts, *God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost according to His own will* (Heb 2:4).

Early 4th and 5th C examples were chiefly connected with either the tombs or relics of these who had died for their faith. Later the same miraculous benefits were associated with anyone famed for sanctity.

Once we reach the Dark Ages it is hard for modern man to appreciate the vast flood of reported wonders and miracles of every type. So gross are many of them that even Catholic writers acknowledge their fundamental difference in character from those in the Word.

In addition to the tons (literally) of wonder-working relics scattered throughout Christendom, many other portents were associated with the strongly rising influence of asceticism and monasticism. There is nothing too hard for a monkish legend. Visions, demonic assaults and miracles abound. It is relic-worship, however, which is unquestionably at the heart of medieval miracles.

The origin of these lying wonders is not hard to find. The many medieval Christian miracle legends are simply reproductions of the motives and even the very incidents of heathendom.

Christians were often simply baptised pagans. So they continued in their heathen modes of thought. One heathen legend transferred entire was that of Barlaam and Joasaph, which is undoubtedly nothing less than the story of Buddha. When it is recalled how asceticism, monasteries, relics and pilgrimages to tombs are so central to Buddhist worship, it is not difficult to see the source of so many of the errors that flooded the Church of Rome. (A full account of the metamorphosis of pagan religion into medieval Christianity is given in study No 7, *"Mystery, Babylon the Great"*.) Christian martyrs and saints became mere reincarnations of the spirit of heathen demi-gods and heroes.

I have mentioned before the strange attraction within Romanism for communion with the dead. This is no mere coincidence, but I think very few really understand or are prepared to accept its full implications. The Roman system is the most advanced and widespread form of spiritualism in existence. It is no coincidence that the Roman Catholic altar is so often simply a coffin enclosing the bones of a saint. The placing of such relics in or below the altar forms a central place in the consecration rite.

Enough of this for the present, however. Suffice it to conclude by recalling the vast extent of miracle legends and superstitious fetishism that pervaded the Church from Constantine.

It need not be assumed that all the wonders and miracles were false. Did not Jannes and Jambres work genuine wonders, even although in direct opposition to the Truth? The spirit of the Papacy, when it had reached its fullest expression, was that of *that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess* (Rev 2:20). She was also a witch. The false prophet, who incarnates the fulness of the powers inherent in false prophets through the ages, is able to work wonders (Rev 13:14). Is it surprising, then, to find such signs in a religious system so impregnated with the spirit of Jezebel?

But even in the awful spiritual darkness of this period, the Lord shed forth true glimpses of His refreshing Light.

According to Stanley Frodsham, for example, there were revivals especially among Waldenses and Albigenses in which many spoke in tongues. Other groups in the 12th and 13th C taught the age of the Holy Spirit wherein men would be under the Spirit's direct guidance and not need priestly intervention. Among these differing groups was a deep consciousness of the reality of the return of Christ and of the gift of prophecy. (A living consciousness of the Spirit's nearness is always accompanied by an awareness of the Kingdom coming in power and glory, for the Holy Ghost is the present foretaste of the future kingdom.)

As might be expected, the jealous wrath of the great whore was aroused by such teachings. They undermined her whole man-controlled Nicolaitan structure. Thyatira was the age of patient suffering. The time had not yet come for a more widespread restoration of the original Word. Persecution therefore followed with some being burned. On the whole these movements were quenched.

(d) Spiritual manifestation in the early Reformation Period

If the Reformation had brought a full restoration of the Word, there would have been also a restoring of the teaching and experience of the gifts and ministries of the Spirit. This was not the case. As in the Middle Ages, little attention was given to the doctrine of the Holy.

It is important to recognise this, and to understand why.

The reason is the same one that lies at the heart of the Reformation's failure: a misconception of the nature and government of the Church.

The Nicolaitan spirit is not simply the spirit of Rome. The Roman system is the fullest manifestation of that foul spirit. But "*Mystery, Babylon the great*" is more than Rome. It existed before the Roman system ever came into being; was at work through all Christendom when there was no Roman Church as we know it today; and has operated beyond the borders of the Roman system since her formation. The essence of the Nicolaitan spirit is the replacing of the rule of the Spirit in the Church by a human government.

The mainline Reformers almost escaped from the whole Catholic Nicolaitan governmental system. Then they drew back again. They lost their grip on so much that they needed to be admonished of the Lord to be careful to strengthen those things which DID remain.

Due to the prevalence of the Church-State form of ecclesiastical government, there was very little demonstration of the Spirit during the first hundred years or so of the Reformation era. The only examples were sadly deficient in sound doctrine. In the 1520s, for example, the Zwickau prophets and Thomas Muntzer taught the restoration of apostles and prophets, and the immediate inspiration of the Spirit, claiming to receive direct communication from God by prophecy, visions and dreams. They also preached fervently the near return of Christ and establishment of His Kingdom on earth. Unfortunately, like the mainline Reformers, these and other similar groups were blinded by the Old Testament concept of the power of the State being used in religious affairs. In several cases they became directly involved in politics and sought to establish the Kingdom by force of arms. Such groups often claimed to receive visions and prophecies giving places and dates for the Lord's return.

In the past such groups were often lumped together indiscriminately under the general heading of Anabaptist, along with the many fine men of God who felt compelled to withdraw from the Reformers in order to return more fully to the Word. Modern historians are now quite clear, however, that such extremists were in no way representative of the Anabaptists, nor were their excesses acknowledged by them.

All in all, the 16th C was very deficient in the apostolic ministry of the early Church. There were, however, underground forces at work seeking a return to apostolic signs and wonders. These burst into the open in the following century.

(e) The 17th C Radical Pietist movement on the Continent

Inevitably the Lutheran and Reformed churches suffered a severe loss of the blessing and presence of the Lord by their slipping back and persecution of those who sought to go further.

Lutheranism quickly lost the sense of a personal salvation. It degenerated into a mere mental assent to a carefully formulated creed and became more preoccupied with a rigid doctrinal orthodoxy than the reality of a godly life.

Reacting against this cold formalism, "Pietist" societies arose within 17th C Lutheranism to encourage a personal Spiritual life and search for God.

Certain of these groups (called "radical" Pietists) experienced the manifestation of the Spirit. They taught that man could be instructed by the "inner light" (Jn 8:12), and resisted an unwholesome dependence upon external religious organisations. Men should commune with God personally, and not merely fall into a Protestant version of the Romish dependence upon Church, priests and sacraments. These brethren experienced visions and trances. Whole congregations would begin to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. As might be expected, they had a deep conviction and sense of the coming Kingdom and reign of God. This trend sprung up spontaneously in different places at different times. No denomination ever rose up as a result of it.

One man much influenced by Pietist views was Jean de Labadie (1610—1674). Whilst in a Jesuit college he formed strong views on the direct influence of the Spirit upon believers. Leaving the Roman system he joined the Reformed (Calvinistic) Church. After twenty years, in which by strong preaching he sought to reform the worldliness of the Dutch Reformed

churches, he was suspended from office. He protested against the whole system of synods and set liturgical forms, with church authorities taking papal powers to themselves and binding the people's consciences with their ordinances. He warned of the setting up of a new Popery acting as though above the Word.

Expelled by the Reformed Synod, he formed an independent assembly. This was harried by the civil authorities at the instigation of the Reformed clergy. Broadbent, a Brethren writer, describes how the manifestation of the Spirit was experienced in it:

“They were engaged in the breaking of bread ... when a strange Spiritual ecstasy came over, first some, then all of them; they began to speak with tongues and then stood up and danced and this lasted for about an hour. At somewhat rare intervals similar manifestations were repeated” (p 268).

That such incidents should be termed “strange” is a mute testimony as to how far the Church still was from her Blood-bought birthright in the Holy Ghost.

(f) George Fox and the early Quakers

In addition to the Radical Pietists, there were others on the Continent who sought a fuller experience of the Lord and of the supernatural manifestations of the early Church.

For a hundred years a succession of reformers proclaimed the reality of the inward Light and the inward Word. They believed men would appear with apostolic authority confirmed by signs and wonders sent to restore the powers of the early Church. Whilst waiting for such a restoration they had to content themselves with an invisible Church of unorganised believers.

Dirck Coornhert (born 1522) was one such. He was the father of the Dutch “seeker movement” known as the Collegiants. He proposed an interim Church whilst waiting or “seeking” for God to set up an authentic one. To found this they looked for heaven-sent apostles confirmed by signs and wonders.

In England the conflict has already been described between the established Church and those, especially Baptists and Independents (Congregationalists), seeking a fuller return to the New Testament pattern.

In addition there were other widely scattered and unconnected groups hungering to taste the good Word of God in all its fulness and to experience personally the communion of the Spirit.

For example, the continental “Seekers” had their English counterparts likewise awaiting a restoration of the apostolic Church in pentecostal Spirit and power. They taught a rejection of the doctrines, organisation and ceremonies of the visible churches, since no true Church had existed since the spirit of antichrist became uppermost.

In addition there were the “radical Puritans”. Perhaps they were influenced by the famous Puritan expositor, Thomas Goodwin. He taught that the sealing of the Spirit was analogous to the baptism of the Spirit, and subsequent to regeneration. He acknowledged this as a normal in New Testament times, and urged believers to,

“sue out the will of Christ, sue out that last legacy of His. It was the fruit of His ascension - when He was ascended up and received this Promise, then He poured it out.”

The existence both in England and on the Continent of so many underground groups seeking the reality of an indwelling Christ and a fresh revelation and demonstration of the Spirit are a damning indictment of the failure of the Reformation ecclesiastical systems. They were unable to satisfy the legitimate God-given longing to taste of the powers of the world to come because of their move backward towards the pit whence they had escaped.

But God be thanked, the tide had now turned. Those hungering for the resurrected Christ in the Middle Ages found the tide strongly against them, But now the blessed Lord had turned the flow. The progressive restoration of the full birthright of the Church of the first-born was under way.

Into this background the Lord raised up one, George Fox (1624-1691). He bore fearless public testimony to the reality and experience of the Holy Ghost in the life of the believer. His anointed itinerant preaching quickly attracted those seeking the original apostolic pattern. Many Seekers, along with other hidden groups hungering for the full fellowship and liberty of the Holy Ghost in Christ's Body, were absorbed into the emerging Quaker movement which arose through Fox's ministry. His clarion voice gave co-ordination, vision and direction to the often-subconscious yearnings of many hearts.

From about 1652 this movement grew very rapidly to between 20 and 50,000, despite heavy persecution, firstly from the Puritans and later from the restored Church of England.

It is enlightening to see why the Puritans opposed.

The Puritans, Independents and Baptists had in varying degrees gone further than the state Church. Yet even they were unwilling wholly to shake off the Nicolaitan spirit of human control and to accept Holy Ghost government. Quaker teaching and experience of the leading of the Holy Ghost struck at the very heart of Nicolaitanism. Hence, whilst having to acknowledge the existence of the remarkable work of God which took place among the early Quakers, Protestant commentators tend to treat this movement as somewhat of an abnormality. They concentrate on the Puritans, Presbyterians, Independents and Baptists, seeing these as the focal point of God's dealings in this period. It seems, however, that to find the group most close to God in any age, it is necessary to research those groups one step ahead of the bodies usually given most attention by church historians. Spiritual revelation is as necessary to understand Church history as it is the Bible. We need the testimony of the Spirit upon outward events.

The Quakers were resented by those seeking reform of the existing inadequate ecclesiastical structures, but who were satisfied to remain within the limits already attained. Puritan clergy in England and New England greeted Quakerism with the fury that an old left often reserves for a new.

The root of their separation lay in the Puritan rejection of immediate revelation. In their zeal to uphold the Scriptures as the sole basis of faith, they forbade that which the Scriptures themselves allow. Where does the Word say the Lord no longer speaks by visions or dreams, or by those supernatural gifts of which Paul wrote we should not be ignorant?

The occurrence of visions, revelations, prophecies, healings, supernatural deliverance from danger and direct divine judgements on opposers all aroused great fury. In Virginia, for example, in 1660 an Act was passed against the Quakers. They were denounced for teaching miracles, visions, prophecies, etc. By 1661 four Quakers had already been hung in Massachusetts. In England a pamphlet war was waged against them. The most vehement resentment was directed against healings and miracle working. Reformed theology could accept what they called miraculous "providences". But the mere thought of individual men endowed with the same wonder-working power that healed the sick in the Word was just too much for them. The most the faith of contemporary English Anglicans, Presbyterians, Puritans and Non-conformists could rise to appears to have been occasional instances of anointing the sick with oil (by Baptists mainly) and congregational prayer for sick members.

In his Journal Fox wrote concerning the denominations of his day:

"they cannot bear to hear that any should come, whilst upon earth, into the same power and Spirit that the prophets and apostles were in, though none can understand their writings without the same Spirit by which they were written".

The burden of his message was to turn men to the Anointing which teaches, and that they should cease to look to men. This emphasis was wholly necessary since Protestantism was in danger of going down the same road that led the Church from the time of Constantine into the depths of satan. Sacraments, church traditions, Nicolaitan governmental structures, set prayers and forms of worship were all indications of a lack of the Headship of Christ in His Body.

It is certain that Fox went too far in his reaction against lifeless formalities. He refused even those external forms ordained of God, such as water baptism, the breaking of bread, and Scriptural local church organisation. Yet it is also certain that this over-emphasis was less dangerous than a reformed Protestantism which did not direct men to the experience of the inner teaching of the Spirit as promised under the new covenant (Heb 8:10-11; Jn 6:45), nor to a form of church government where the Headship of Christ was fully exercised.

The continuing Nicolaitan organisation of the Reformation Churches enabled the spirit of antichrist to rob the people of the living Word. Even movements such as Independents and Baptists, who rejected central control of their assemblies, failed to benefit fully in the day of their visitation. Many left to walk in the fuller manifestation of the Spirit among the early Quakers. Their movements declined in Spiritual power and effectiveness despite much in them that was good. They were of little consequence in the following century during the great evangelical awakenings.

The essence of Fox's ministry was to direct men to the reality of the indwelling Spirit. His meetings were occasions where the Spirit could minister through whom He would, unfettered by man-made regulations. On one occasion when he prayed, men testified that the very building shook under the power of God. Often Quakers laid hands on the sick and they recovered. Both by visions, dreams and prophecy the mind of the Lord was made known for specific guidance. There was also speaking with tongues and outbursts of singing in the Spirit in some early Quaker meetings. Constant examples are found of revelations, discerning of spirits and the healing of those possessed of demons.

In the conflict with the authorities in Cromwell's day, the Spirit of the Lord raised up His servants to prophesy against attempts to silence the Quaker testimony. It was revealed that the

government would be overthrown. One went to Cromwell and rending his cap before him declared, "so shall thy government be rent from thee and thy house". Another went to Parliament with a pitcher, broke it and told them they would likewise be broken. And thus it was. Fox himself had a revelation both of Cromwell's soon death and of the plague and fire of London at the hands of the angel of the Lord. Often in the courts, where Quakers were summoned because of their faith, the power of the Spirit of God was so strong that the magistrates could scarcely speak.

Since Constantine I have been unable to discover any account so documented of the movings of the Spirit of God, not just in one man or a small group, but among such a large body and in such a public and widespread manner. Quaker missionaries went to the West Indies, New England, Holland and Germany. Truly theirs was a ministry as described in the Word:

God also hearing them witness, both with signs and wonders and divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will. (Heb 2:4)

I wish I could give more detail of Fox's teaching on the inner Light, the all-sufficiency of Christ, deliverance from the power of indwelling sin and restoration to the image of God, the inner reality of the Kingdom of God, and living in the power of Christ's endless Life. How deeply refreshing this is. I can only recommend the reading of his Journal, for space forbids. (See also <http://www.quakerinfo.com/healing1.shtml> & <http://archive.org/stream/beginningsofquak00brai#page/n15/mode/2up>)

Even though there were definite deficiencies in Quakerism which I cannot now properly examine, and though the movement lost the Spirit it first walked in (whilst retaining the outer form), it was indicative of the growing tide of restoration. The manifestation accompanying its early ministry would become more and more widespread in the succeeding centuries, in different lands and among widely varying groups.

The tide had not only turned; the flow was increasing. O Lord, *with Thee is the Fountain of Life* (Ps 36:9).

(g) Conclusion: The Reformers' doctrine

In closing let us review the Reformers' teachings on the gifts of the Spirit, and those ministry gifts (apostles, prophets, etc.) set in the Church for her edification. Not only was the lack of deep Spiritual life in this period the fruit of the Reformers' actions in drawing back from earlier light. It was also a result of their doctrine.

Let us first consider their teachings on the gifts of the Spirit.

In one of his letters Luther wrote: "Christ did not make anointing with oil a sacrament, nor do James' words (Jas 5:14) apply to the present day. For in those days the sick were often cured through a miracle and the earnest prayer of faith." Based on similar reasoning, Thorndike writes that anointing the sick with oil "is laid aside in all the reformed churches upon presumption of common sense, that the reason is no longer in force ... to restore health by the grace of miracles that no longer exist." This is why in George Fox's day only the Baptists (not a mainstream Reformation movement), and even they only rarely, anointed the sick with oil.

Luther's views on the cessation of the miraculous were shared by the other most famed Protestant theologian of his day, Calvin.

In one place he wrote of “those singular gifts whereby God would have certain endowed, at the beginning of the gospel, to beautify the Kingdom of Christ”. Since he considered supernatural gifts to have been done away with in his day, he declined to discuss them in his commentary on 1 Corinthians. Referring to miracles, gifts of healings, and interpretation of tongues, he wrote “As to those which are temporary I say nothing, for it is not worth while to dwell upon them”. In fact, so far from understanding the true nature of the gifts of the Spirit had the Church gone in his day that the gift of interpretation was applied by Calvin to interpreting the meaning of difficult passages of Scripture. Singing with the Spirit and with the understanding (1 Cor 14:15) are described as singing “with the voice and the heart”. Confusion over prophesying is even worse. Prophesying *according to the proportion of faith* (Ro 12:6) is letting our teaching accord with the whole tenor of Scripture. Indeed, so confused is he over the gift of prophecy that he explicitly contrasts the direct ministry of the Spirit referred to in 1 Thessalonians 5:19 with the *prophesyings* referred to in the following verse, seeking to show that the ministry of the Spirit and pastoral teaching ought not to be in disagreement.

In view of this deep confusion over the gift of prophecy, it is only to be expected that the ministry of a New Testament prophet will be likewise misunderstood. As with the gift, so also this office is considered to have been only temporary, at the beginning of the Gospel. Calvin considered both apostles and prophets to be extraordinary offices which have no place once local churches have been duly constituted. Concerning the form of the Church’s ministry he writes: “Some of them, as apostles, prophets and evangelists are temporary. Others, as pastors and teachers are perpetual and indispensable”. The distinctive ministries of apostle and prophet were so inadequately apprehended that Calvin said, “The same resemblance which our teachers have to the ancient prophets, pastors have to the apostles ... Pastors (except that each has government of a particular church assigned to him) have the same function as apostles”.

In all Calvin’s extensive writings there is scarcely any reference to the supernatural ministry of the Church apart from the above references.

The age as a whole failed to appreciate the full ministry of Christ in and through His Body. The supernatural ministries and gifts of the early Church were not simply missing from believers’ actual experience. They were explicitly taught as having ceased. Those who said otherwise were censured.

It must of course be remembered that the Reformers (and for that matter the Anabaptists) had to contend with certain fanatical groups who often stressed the restoration of apostles and prophets, the possibility of direct inspiration by the Spirit and the imparting of supernatural gifts. Among these were the Zwickau prophets, Thomas Muntzer, and the Munsterites in Germany. In Holland were the followers of David Joris, who was disowned by the Biblical Anabaptists. He claimed the Scriptures were inadequate and to be supplemented by his own inspired writings. Calvin even mentions those who disdained the reading of the Word altogether preferring to be led only “by the Spirit”. (How strange for the Spirit to lead away from the very Word He inspired!) Many other examples could be given of claimed visions, prophecies and revelations abounding in the early days of the Reformation, and tending to add to the confusion. All these greatly added to the spiritual pressures against the Reformers in their colossal battle to uphold the Truth.

The presence of these extremists, however, does not excuse the Reformers' attitude to the plain teaching of Scripture.

On what Biblical basis can it be claimed that apostles, prophets and evangelists are only temporary? On what basis can it be said that these ministries together with the gifts of the Spirit were limited to the early days of the Church?

Whilst appreciating the dangers facing the Reformers, no less spiritually dangerous was the position of the new Protestant denominations themselves. The testimony of the Spirit is that they were devoid of Life. The Bible had been restored to the hands of the common people, and the foundation of the sovereignty of God in justification well laid. But overall, Protestantism had only returned to the position of the Church in the Pergamos age.

The Spirit had been squeezed out of the government of the newly formed Protestant Church, and His manifestation quenched among the members of the Body. The little missionary work that was undertaken in this age by the chief Reformation denominations was usually the decision of Protestant monarchs, who directed it as an affair of State. This bore no resemblance to the apostolic evangelism of the Acts:

God also hearing them witness, both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost (Heb 2:4).

LET US GO ON UNTO PERFECTION

I have now concluded my attempt to put the Reformation into its overall context in God's plan to restore to the Church the truth as it is in Christ which had been lost over the years.

I repeat that this study is not intended to undermine the real achievements of the Reformation but to put them in a fuller context.

Of course, no one group was perfect. Of the main Reformation denominations the Lutherans and Anglicans are the least reformed. The Presbyterian (Calvinistic, or Reformed) Churches were a considerable improvement on these, but are still noticeably deficient compared with the continental Anabaptists. The latter also were lacking in certain respects, particularly in supernatural manifestation and vindication. Where the latter was found, such as among the Quakers, there was an unjustifiable disregard for those outward acts, such as water baptism and the Lord's supper, which are clearly taught in the Scriptures.

The atmosphere pervading the Reformation age is one of incompleteness.

Like the Galatians, and in many respects in similar ways, the Reformers had turned back:

Are you so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye made perfect by the flesh? ... How turn ye back to the weak and beggarly elements whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? (Gal 3:3; 4:9)

They established a most blessed foundation of the sovereignty of God in justification, leaving no room for human glory. How pure an air is this to breathe after the suffocating odour of the man-made salvation of Rome. All the Reformers reveal a deep understanding of sovereignty, election and predestination, clearly proclaiming the first great restoration principle, SALVATION IS OF THE LORD.

As happens also with many individual believers and assemblies, however, there was a failure to go on unto perfection. The ever-present danger of stopping short of God's full purpose characterised the whole Reformation age. They relaxed their vigilance and fell asleep. Unlike our brother Paul, they stopped short of the fulness of the hope of our calling:

I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ. Brethren I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:12—14).

Despite the failure of men, however, God's purpose is not to be frustrated. The tide had turned at last. From now on the force of the current of Church history was behind the movement for restoration. In the words of John Myers (*Another Wave Rolls In*):

“The wave may be defeated,
But the tide is sure to win.”

Each incoming wave spends itself and then recedes. But more follow, each progressing further than the last. The systems that came out of the Reformation have now virtually lost their Spiritual power. The truth they restored, however, continues in each successive wave.

The situation among the many Protestant groups late in the Sardis age was well summed up by Jan Amos Comenius in 1669 in his work, *One Thing Needful*:

“The great number of teachers is the reason of the multitude of sects, for which we shall soon have no names left. Each church reckons itself as the true one, or at least as the purest, truest part of it, while among themselves they persecute each other with the bitterest hatred. No reconciliation is to be hoped for between them; they meet enmity with irreconcilable enmity. Out of the Bible they forge their different creeds; these are their fortresses and bulwarks behind which they entrench themselves and resist all attacks. I will not say that these confessions of faith — for that they are so we can admit in most cases — are bad in themselves. They became so, however, in that they feed the fire of enmity; only by putting them away altogether would it be possible to set to work on healing the wounds of the Church ... In Divine service the words of men are usually heard more than the Word of God. Each one chatters as he pleases, or kills time by learned disquisitions and disproving the views of others. Of the new birth and how a man may be changed into the likeness of Christ to become a partaker of the Divine Nature (2 P 1:4), scarcely anything is said... The sacraments, given as symbols of unity, of love, and of our life in Christ, have been made the occasion of bitterest conflict, a cause of mutual hatred, a centre of sectarianism ... In short, Christendom has become a labyrinth. The faith has been split into a thousand little parts and you are made a heretic if there is one of them you do not accept ... What can help? ONLY THE ONE THING NEEDFUL, RETURN TO CHRIST, looking to Christ as the only Leader and walking in His footsteps, setting aside all other ways until we all reach the goal, and have come to the unity of the faith (Eph 4:13). As the Heavenly Master built everything on the ground of the Scriptures so should we leave all particularities of our special confessions and be satisfied with the revealed Word of God which belongs to us all. With the Bible in our hand we should cry: I believe what God has revealed in this Book; I will obediently keep His commands; I hope for that which He has promised. Christians, give ear! There is only one Life, but death comes to us in a thousand forms. There is only one Truth, but error has a thousand forms. There is only one Christ, but a thousand antichrists ... So thou knowest, O Christendom, what is the one thing needful. Either thou turnest back to Christ or thou goest to destruction like the antichrist. If thou art wise and will live, follow the Leader of Life” (E H Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, pp 138-140).

Protestantism was swallowed up by the spirit of denomination. But the restoration continues. The incoming tide will restore Christ wholly to the Church. For the Reformers, He was their righteousness. Before His return He will be *all and in all* to a Church *filled with the fulness of Him that filleth all in all* (Eph 1:23). In their day the Reformers achieved much for which we are thankful. Much more has been restored since then, however. The work they left uncompleted is progressing to its completion: *till we all come to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ*.

Brethren, let us not be content to remain where we are, nor at the position that our church or movement has reached. Let us purpose within our innermost beings to *go on unto perfection* (Heb 6:1). Let us savour the fulness of Christ to the extent that He may be known on earth. Let us lay down our lives that He may obtain His objective in His Church before He comes. Do not lose your first love. Hold firm all the Truth you have and press on into all that lies before. Possess your inheritance in all its fulness: the ONE THING NEEDFUL, CHRIST HIMSELF.

Amen.