

Roman Catholic, Baptist, Christian Reformed, Presbyterian, Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, Episcopal, United Church of Christ, United Methodist, Nazarene, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Disciples of Christ, Church of God

DENOMINATIONS UNITE IN THE LIGHT OF FISCAL COLLAPSE AND CLERGY DYSFUNCTION. DETERIORATION ATTRIBUTED TO COMPROMISE.

Recently the media has drawn attention to an epidemic in clergy dysfunction which has led to estimates of up to 1000 pastors being fired per month, according to the Focus on the Family organization. Southern Baptist leaders estimate that 225 pastors a month are being fired from their churches. These staggering statistics have prompted the Baptist Sunday School Board to form programs like Leader-Care to help burned-out or tossed-out pastors -- and their families -- talk through their crises and get help. A number of other mainstream Protestant denominations are pursuing a slightly different approach.

On August 8th, 1997, the Lutheran Church voted to approve a plan to share clergy and Holy Communion with the Presbyterian Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and the Reformed Church of America. A similar plan with the 2.5 million-member Episcopal Church fell six votes short of the required two-thirds majority at the Church-wide Assembly of the

Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

At the same time, the Associated Press reported that the Lutherans have also taken steps toward lifting the condemnations they and the Roman Catholic Church heaped on one another during the 16th-century battles that split Western Christianity.

Deterioration attributed to compromise embraced during the Protestant Reformation:

In 1519, Martin Luther -- then a Catholic monk nailed his 95 theses to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral.

In those theses, "Luther asked: "How is the sinner reconciled to God?" It was the Catholic insistence on good works, he argued, that had led some Catholics to believe they could pay money to the church in lieu of doing penance and charity.

Luther insisted that faith alone "justified" a sinner. The argument eventually became so enflamed that the Vatican condemned all who agreed with Luther, and his followers replied with a similar condemnation of all who agreed with Rome. [Lutherans, Catholics find common understanding--Knight-Ridder Newspapers]

The Roman Catholic Church points out, Protestantism recognizes no rule of faith, no teacher, save the "infallible Bible. As the Catholic yields his judgment in spiritual matters implicitly, and with

unreserved confidence, to the voice of his church, so, too, the Protestant recognized no teacher but the Bible. All his spirituality is derived from its teachings. It is to him the voice of God addressing him through his sole inspired teacher. It embodies his religion, his faith, and his practice. The language of Chillingworth, "The Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible, is the religion of Protestants," is only one form of the same idea multi-furiously convertible into other forms, such as "the Book of God," "the Charter of Our Salvation," "the Oracle of Our Christian Faith," "God's Text-Book to the race of Mankind," etc., etc. It is then, an incontrovertible fact that the Bible alone is the teacher of Protestant Christianity.

The Sabbath:

The Protestant world has been, from its infancy, in the sixteenth century, in thorough accord with the Catholic Church, in keeping "holy," not Saturday, but Sunday. The discussion of the grounds that led to this unanimity of sentiment and practice for over 300 years, must help toward placing Protestantism on a solid basis in this particular, should the arguments in favor if its position overcome those furnished by the Israelites and Sabbath keeping Christians, the Bible, the sole recognized teacher of both litigants, being the umpire and witness. If, however, on the other hand, the latter furnish arguments, incontrovertible by the great mass of Protestants, both classes of litigants, appealing their common teacher, the Bible, the great body of Protestants, so far from clamoring, as they do with vigorous pertinacity for the strict keeping of Sunday, have no other resource left than the admission that they

have been teaching and practicing what is Scripturally false for over three centuries, by adopting the teaching and practice of what they have always pretended to believe an apostate church, contrary to every warrant and teaching of sacred Scripture. To add to the intensity of this Scriptural and unpardonable blunder, it involves one of the most positive and emphatic commands of God to His servant, man: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

It was upon this very point that the Reformation was condemned by the Council of Trent. The Reformers had constantly charged, as here stated, that the Catholic Church had apostatized from the truth as contained in the written word. "The written word," "The Bible and the Bible only," "Thus saith the Lord," these were there constant watchwords; and "The Scripture, as in the written word, the sole standard of appeal," this was the proclaimed platform of the Reformation and of Protestantism. "The Scripture and tradition," "The Bible as interpreted by the Church and according to the unanimous consent of the Fathers," this was the position and claim of the Catholic Church. This was the main issue in the Council of Trent, which was called especially to consider the questions that had been raised and forced upon the attention of Europe by the Reformers. The very first question concerning faith that was considered by the council was the question involved in this issue. There was a strong party even of the Catholics within the council who were in favor of abandoning tradition and adopting the Scriptures only, as the standard of authority. This view was so decidedly held in the debates in the

council, that the pope's legates actually wrote to him that there was "a strong tendency to set aside tradition altogether and make Scripture the sole standard of appeal. By this crisis was devolved upon the ultra-Catholic portion of the council the task of convincing the others that "Scripture and tradition" was the only sure ground to stand upon. If this could be done, the council could be carried to issue a decree condemning the Reformation, otherwise not. The question was debated day after day until the council was fairly brought to a standstill. Finally, after a long and intense mental strain, the Archbishop of Reggio came into the council with substantially the following argument to the party who held for Scripture alone:

"The Protestants claim to stand upon the written word only. They profess to hold the Scripture alone as the standard of faith. They justify their revolt by the plea that the Church has apostatized from the written word and follows tradition. Now the Protestants' claim that they stand upon the written word only, is not true. Their profession of holding the Scripture alone as the standard of faith, is false. Proof: The written word explicitly enjoins the observance of the seventh day as the Sabbath. They do not observe the seventh day, but reject it. If they do truly hold the Scripture alone as their standard, they would be observing the seventh day as is enjoined in the Scripture throughout. Yet they not only reject the observance of the Sabbath enjoined in the written word, but they have adopted and do practice the observance of Sunday, for which they have only the tradition of the Church. Consequently the claim of 'Scripture alone as the standard' fails; and the doctrine of 'Scripture and tradition' as

essential, is fully established, the Protestants themselves being judges."

The history of the world cannot present a more stupid, self-stultifying specimen of dereliction of principle than this. The teacher demands emphatically in every page that the law of the Sabbath be observed every week, by all recognizing it as "the only infallible teacher," whilst the disciples of that teacher have not once for over three hundred years observed the divine precept! That immense concourse of Biblical Christians, the Methodists, have declared that the Sabbath has never been abrogated, whilst the followers of the Church of England, together with her daughter, the Episcopal Church of the United States, are committed by the twentieth article of religion, already quoted, to the ordinance that the Church cannot lawfully ordain anything "contrary to God's written word." God's written word enjoins His worship to be observed on Saturday absolutely, repeatedly, and most emphatically, with a most positive threat of death to him who disobeys. All the Biblical sects occupy the same self-stultifying position which no explanation can modify, much less justify.

[The Catholic Mirror, Baltimore, MD -- Excerpts from editorials published on September 2, 9, 16, and 23, 1893]