

STRAIGHTWAY

"And straightway they forsook their nets, and followed him" [Mark 1:18].

CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP

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“THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS”

by Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, Founder & President
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As we approach the Easter Season on the Protestant Calendar of ten annual “holy days” in the year, we need to bear respect for such memories of our Christian past. More and more, in this time of apostate christianity, we need every encouraging member of our heritage as Christians plowing down through church history. We need every reminder of the days of our forebears who blazed the trail along the route of historic christianity.

Ten Protestant Holy Days in the Year

The following days are still revered among some protestants as the result of the legacy left to Luther’s Reformation: Christmas, the New Year, Twelfth-night, Family Week, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost, Reformation Sunday, and Thanksgiving. Of course, the Sunday-Sabbath is regular for 52 times in the year. In looking back over these Ten Holy Days of the Protestant, we see several almost extinct in our memory. Twelfth-night is commemorative of

the visit of the Wise Men, usually thought of as January 6th each year. Pentecost is also known as Whitsunday, the seventh Sunday after Easter, remembering the descent of the Holy Spirit and the birth of the Church. Family Week and Thanksgiving Day are usually associated with a national remembrance in the birth of our beloved country. Reformation Sunday, the nearest Sunday to October 31st of each year, reminds us of the departure of Christians from their former slavery in Roman Catholicism. Of course, the weekly Christian Sunday-Sabbath is given in remembrance of both Creation, when God rested on the Sabbath, Seventh Day, as well as the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on Sunday; in the early days called “the first day sabbath,” or the first day after Sabbath.

In the Foundations Bible Collegiate Church we endeavor to remember these holy days in our annual calendar without a high church liturgy. But there is no doubt in our minds that the Christian Sunday, the “Lord’s Day,”

and these other historic celebrations and commemorations are vital memories to keep God's people conscious of their historical legacy since the times of Christ.

The New Moon and Days of Remembrances

The New Moon is the most neglected of all the special Old Testament occasions, but it should be noted that the sound of the trumpet announcing each "New Moon" was very definite in each of the twelve months in the lives of Israel. It included special family days as they would appear in the lives of their parents and children. Edersheim marks this as an occasion for David to return home for an annual sacrifice which involved his parents and family (I Samuel 20:6,29); and also occasions, in contrast, King Saul's banquet (I Samuel 20:5,24) when David feared for his own life before him. Some have thought that the New Moon also marked Job's special family occasions in their festivities or birthdays (Job 1:13). Some scholars associate the "New Moon" marking the month for other birthdays and anniversaries

within the relatives of the various families. Of course, all of these things open up the doors of thought for worthy opportunities for all of us in the privacy of our lives and relatives and families. All of us enjoy special times like this, and more and more as we see the breakage of the families in our country because of separation and divorce. The breaking of bread together within the daily meals of our families is akin to "The Lord's Supper" in that they are both marked by the same symbol. I must acknowledge that Sunday Worship, family meals, and the Lord's Supper mean more to me, personally, in the ministry, than ever before. Regular church worship is probably the most regular, repeating miracle God promised to His people in the Bible. It is a genuine miracle when a regular place becomes a particular place where God's Spirit, presence, and Word are manifested in reverence to our transcendent God. Somewhere between the home and the church are our greatest privileges on earth in the pilgrim walk. We need to advantage ourselves with these privileges more and more as we see the day of the approaching return of our Lord Jesus to the earth (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Clusters of Holy Days

In these weeks prior to Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter, we see the largest cluster of Holy Days. January usually has both Twelfth-night and Family Week; within a thirty-day period we have Reformation (October 31st) and Thanksgiving Day (the last Thursday in November). However, after Palm Sunday, Easter marks the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and becomes a central

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teaching of the Gospel with the catalyst being the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

In the Old Testament, a boy at the age of twelve became not only acquainted with but had to be amenable to being present for three seasons of the seven feasts in the annual calendar. There was both a civil calendar (remembering creation; beginning in October) and a religious calendar (remembering passover; beginning in April). Of course, the new moon would mark an early or late beginning of these two calendars and their respective months.

The religious calendar obligated the “manchild” (twelve years old) to be present in the spring (passover, unleavened bread, firstfruits), in the summer (feast of weeks or pentecost), and in the winter (trumpets, Day of Atonement, tabernacles). There were three clusters represented here. The first cluster was measured by passover, the second cluster was measured from firstfruits to pentecost, and the third cluster was measured from the blowing of trumpets. Directly or indirectly all of the six feasts were measured from passover, which to the Christian represents the Death of the Lord Jesus Christ at Golgotha (the Aramaic-Hebrew word), the same place as Calvary (the Greek-Latin word).

Luther’s Theology of the Cross

The Old Testament Passover Lamb is also the truth of the New Testament Golgotha-Calvary Lamb. The lambs of passover are fulfilled in the Lamb of God at Calvary. Good Friday and the Cross become the very center of the Christian’s Faith; without it there is no redemption or resurrection.

We are being told by those who are presently writing on Luther again that more information is being studied from heretofore laid aside writings of Luther and the writers of his time. Alister E. McGrath is something of a leader in these acquisitions of thought, and we rejoice in a number of fresh considerations which are being made of the history of Martin Luther’s impact upon the Protestant world down through a continued growing history.

One of those growing interests concerns Luther’s “Theology of the Cross.” Heretofore, the doctrine of “Justification by Faith” has been one of the most important truths from Luther, although other biblical truths were brought forward in the Reformation. We still rejoice in the blessing of Justification by Faith to the Christian Faith. However, it might be that too much stress has been made upon this singular doctrine to the neglect of other truths equally present in the Reformation. We are particularly thinking of the Cross.

Justification by Faith

We must remember that the doctrine of Justification by Faith did indeed come up before Luther’s emphasis of this in the 16th century, so much needed for the Protestant Reformation against Roman Catholicism.

During the course of the Pelagian controversy, in the Council of Carthage (418), a preliminary clarification was made of the church’s teaching on Justification by Faith. However, these pronouncements were vague and proved insufficient and therefore ineffective for the benefit of the doctrine itself to others.

These matters on this doctrine were also revised at the Second Council of Orange (529), but here again, nothings lasting was wrought.

These undone councils arrived at the Council of Trent (1545) without influence, and “recent scholarship has established that no theologian of the Middle Ages ever cites the decisions of Orange II, or shows the slightest awareness of the existence of such decisions” (Alister E. McGrath; **Luther’s Theology of the Cross**; Baker Books; 1994; page 11). Of course, the Council of Trent destroyed the doctrine completely from Romanism.

Whereas Luther’s Ninety-five Theses nailed to the door of Wittenberg Cathedral, October 31, 1517, effected the best spiritual success, yet Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt posted 151 theses for disputation at the same Cathedral, earlier, on April 26, 1517. Being the dean of the theology faculty at Wittenberg, Karlstadt’s theses chiefly concerned the doctrine of justification, a discovery he had made through the **vera theologia** of Augustine he had discovered earlier the same year. It is also known that Johannes Eck posted a series of theses at Ingolstadt for public academic disputation, related to the vexed question of “usury.” It was the custom in that day for a faculty member to pose and post such items for academic disputation on the door of their cathedral or church. Later, Meister Eck would be Luther’s antagonist at the Leipzig disputation of 1519.

The Heidelberg Disputation of 1518

Martin Luther had been a member

of the Augustinian Order since September of 1505, and he was invited to speak before that order in 1518 at the request of Johannes von Staupitz, the leading Augustinian at Heidelberg. It was there that Luther presented his “Theology of the Cross,” and probably for the first time as a public lecture or sermon. This presentation was made on April 26, 1518, and centered around the scriptures which revealed the “hidden cross” as set forth in the words of God to Moses and placing him in the “cleft of the rock” (Genesis 33:18-23). The sermon itself is very hard to locate now in the printed books on **The Heidelberg Disputation**, as only references are made to the sermon itself.

Undoubtedly, Luther’s “**theology of the cross**” is far more than an historical idea.” We believe it became central to the entire theological system of Luther, and outweighs his famous emphasis on “Justification by Faith.” The following words set forth the mind of another author.

The theology of the cross has assumed a new significance and urgency in the present century, in the aftermath of two world wars and with the ever-increasing threat of a third. The increasing recognition of the shallowness and naïveté of much Christian thinking about God and man has caused many to begin to retrace the steps taken by Luther before them, and to join him as he kneels at the foot of the cross, and adores the God who is “hidden in suffering”(Alister E. McGrath).

These are words not from a fundamentalist but only one somewhat removed even from the neo-evangelical movement. However, he sees a great truth here in his research of Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer!

We are in great need, in our time, to bring back Luther's presupposition of "the theology of the cross." Without it our own theology will perish! Oh that we might have a mighty revival among all of the saints, at the Cross of Christ. There were other reformers, like Karlstadt, who picked up the word "grace," and magnified it because of the influence of Augustine himself. But is not the Cross of Calvary greater by being the source of all grace? Let every Christian in this world proceed or retreat to the Cross! Let us all meet there this Easter.

Words of Gratitude



Dr. O. Talmadge Spence, in behalf of his family, ex-presses his deep appreciation for all expressions made at this time in behalf of the sudden illness of his dear wife, "Dr. Joye." She is stable and resting in the Arms and Promises of Almighty God awaiting His Will.

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*"Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves,
and let us enter into the defenced cities"
(Jeremiah 8:14a).*

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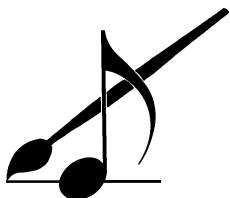
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Oh, to have had a book with these truths many years ago, an elementary work, unnoticeable with a heart calling for sincerity, honesty, purity, upright morals, perseverance in the truth, and an apprehending of God's things and ways, thus the soul will be heard uncluttered, untainted by the gods of this Age, it will sing to win the Heart of God.”

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