



**Front Cover**

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## ***Since A.D. 33***

History records the time and place of the beginning of the various religious denominations of our day. We are not particularly interested in these, since Jesus said, "Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted" (Matthew 15:13).

In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said, "I will build My church." We are interested in when and where this church began and, also, how we may identify it.

Jesus used the term *church* and the term *kingdom* synonymously (Matthew 16:18-19). Paul called the church the *house of God* (I Timothy 3:14-15). Hence, in this study to determine when and where the church began, we may use these terms interchangeably.

### **The Beginning of The Lord's Church**

About 700 B.C., Isaiah prophesied that the church would be established in Jerusalem *in the last days* (Isaiah 2:2-3). In the second chapter of Revelation, we read of the seven churches of Asia, which were churches in actual existence. This was about A.D. 96; so, we may conclude that the church must have been established sometime between 760 B.C. and A.D. 96.

About fifty years after Isaiah made his prophecy, Micah made a similar prophecy (Micah 4:1). This was written about 710 B.C. In about the year A.D. 67, the Apostle Paul referred to the Kingdom (church) as having been received (Hebrews

12:28). In 710 B.C., the church was something of the future, while in A.D. 67, it had been received and was in existence. Thus we conclude that the church must have had its beginning on earth some time between these two dates.

In about 603 B.C., the prophet Daniel predicted that God would at some time in the future set up a kingdom (Daniel 2:44). In about A.D. 64, Paul, in writing to the church at Colosse, speaks of people being "conveyed us into the kingdom" (Colossians 1:13). Then the church was established sometime between 603 B.C. and A.D. 64.

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John the Baptist began his preaching in A.D. 26. Isaiah, Micah, Daniel, and others had prophesied of the coming kingdom. In about A.D. 26, John boldly declared that the kingdom was not only coming, but that it was at hand (Matthew 3:2). About eight years later—A.D. 34, Luke speaks of the church (kingdom) as actually in existence (Acts 8:1). This confines our investigation to a much shorter period of time. In A.D. 26, the church was yet to be established, while in A.D. 34, it was in actual existence. In the year A.D. 27, Christ began to preach that *the kingdom of heaven is at hand* (Matthew 4:17). In about the year A.D. 31, Christ commissioned the twelve to preach: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 10:5-7).

The seventy were sent out by the Lord about one year later, or in A.D. 32, and were told to preach: "The kingdom of God has come near to you" (Luke 10:8-9). It was during the same year that Christ said: "Upon this rock I will build My church" (Matthew 16:18). He did not mean that he would at that time build his church, but that He would build it at some future date. After Christ's death, we read that Joseph of Arimathea was also "waiting for the kingdom of God" (Luke 23-5).

According to these scriptures, the beginning of the church was still future in A.D. 32. Just one year later—A.D. 33—Luke tells us that the Lord was adding people to the church (Acts 2:47). We must conclude that the church began within the year A.D. 32—A.D. 33. But, we can be more specific. In Acts 1:6, we hear the Apostles asking Christ if He would at that time restore the kingdom. This was in A.D. 33, only seven days before the day of Pentecost, and it was upon this day that Luke says the Lord was adding people to the church. Then, the church must have had its beginnings on earth some time during those seven days in A.D. 33. Now let us turn back to some of the early prophecies of the beginning of the church.

1. It is to be in the last days.
2. All nations are to flow into it
3. It is to begin in Jerusalem

In Acts the second chapter—on the day of Pentecost—the day we first find people being added to the church—in Jerusalem—we find the Apostle Peter declaring as he quoted Joel's prophecy, that this is the time referred to as the *last days*. The

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prophets of old predicted that the Lord's house or church would be established on earth in the *last days*. Peter declared "this is what was spoken" (Acts 2:16). It was also on this day the invitation was first extended to *all nations* (Acts 2:39). This accounts for the title of this tract: **Since A.D. 33**. The church which Jesus built had its beginning in Jerusalem on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection, in A.D. 33.

## **The Church Identified**

Having found that the Lord built a church on the earth, and when and where He built it, the next question is: "How may we recognize that church when we find it?" In attempting to identify any person or thing of which we have an accurate description, we simply compare it (or him) with the description. The New Testament gives us an accurate description of the church. To identify the church that Jesus built, we simply need to find the church possessing the divinely described elements. Let us turn to the Bible's description of the church.

### **Its Foundation**

The church has but one foundation. Christ is the foundation of the church (I Corinthians 3:11).

### **Its Head**

Christ is the only head of the church (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18).

### **Its Name**

The church is spoken of in the New Testament as:

1. The church (Ephesians 3:10).
2. The church of God (I Corinthians 1:2).
3. The church of the Lord (Acts 20:28 ASV).
4. The church of the firstborn (Hebrews 12:23).
5. The body, the church (Colossians 1:18).
6. The household of God (Ephesians 2:19).
7. The churches of Christ—speaking of local congregations (Romans 16:16).
8. *My church*—therefore the church of Christ (Matthew 16:18).

9. The church is the bride of Christ, and therefore, wears His name (John 3:29; Romans 7:4; Revelation 21:9; 22:17).

## **Names of the Members**

1. Disciples (Acts 1:15).
2. Brethren (Acts 9:30).
3. Believers (Acts 5:14).
4. Saints (Acts 9:13).
5. Priests (I Peter 2:5, Revelation 1:6).
6. The people of God (Hebrews 4:9).
7. The children of God (I John 3:1-2).
8. Christians (Acts 11:26; 26:28; I Peter 4:16).

## **Its Creed**

The word *creed* comes from the Latin verb *credo*, meaning "I believe." Human churches have human creeds. The divine church had the divine creed. Christ, himself, is the creed of His church (Matthew 16:16; 10:32-33; John 20:30-31; Romans 10:9-10).

## **Its Book of Discipline**

Christ's church has one book of discipline—"the apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42; John 20:22-23; I Corinthians 2:9-13). The apostles' teaching was first oral, but we now have it in written form in the New Testament. The teaching of the apostles as they were guided by the Holy Spirit and sent by Christ is the only Book of Discipline governing Christ's church.

## **The Conditions of Membership**

1. Hearing the gospel.
2. Faith.
3. Repentance.
4. Confession of Christ.
5. Baptism (Matthew 28:18-19; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49; Acts 2:36-41; 8:5-12; 9:5-18; 10:34-48; 16:14-15; 16:31-33; 18:8; 22:14-16; Romans 6:3-5; Galatians 3:26-27; Colossians 2:12; I Peter 3:21).

## **Its Items of Worship**

1. The apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42).
2. Fellowship—contribution and distribution of offerings (II Corinthians 8:4; I Corinthians 16:2; Romans 15:26).
3. Prayer (Acts 12:12; I Thessalonians 5:17).
4. Singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
5. Breaking of the bread—Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:26-29; Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 11:23-34).

## Its Organization

1. The term church is used in the New Testament to indicate:
  - a. All the saved in every nation from the beginning of the Christian era to the end of time (Colossians 1:13).
  - b. The saved, or children of God, of some one province, or group of provinces (II Thessalonians 1:11-12; Acts 9:31).
  - c. The Christians of some one community who assembled together for public worship and who constitute the local congregation in that community (Romans 16:16; I Corinthians 1:2).
  - d. The churches of Christ in New Testament times were independent of one another originally, yet were bound together by a common faith and fellowship. Every church was under the direct authority of Christ (Acts 11:29-30; II Corinthians 8:4).
2. Local churches had two classes of **temporary** officers:
  - a. Apostles. The apostles were personally chosen by the Lord and had no successors (Matthew 10:1-4; Acts 1:3; 13:31; II Peter 1:16; John 20:22-23).
  - b. Prophets. The prophets were inspired teachers (Acts 11:27-28; 13:1-2; Ephesians 4:11). The apostolic and prophetic offices ceased when the New Testament was completed (I Corinthians 13:8-10).
3. Local churches were **permanently** given:
  - a. Elders which were also called bishops, pastors, overseers, presbyters, leaders (Titus 1:5-9; I Timothy 3:1-7; Acts 20:28; I Peter 5:1-4).
  - b. Deacons (Acts 6:1-6; I Timothy 3:8-13).
  - c. Evangelists (Acts 21:8; Ephesians 4:11; II Timothy 4:5).

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## Its Fruits

1. Christian growth (I Peter 2:2; II Peter 1:5-8; 3:18).
2. Christian liberality (Acts 2:32; 11:29-30; Philippians 1:3-8; 4:13-17).
3. the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-25).
4. Gospel preaching (Acts 8:4; 11:19-21; 28:30-31).

## Can You Find The Church That Jesus Built? Are You A Member Of It?

The church that Christ established must have the points of identification given above, together with any other elements described in the New Testament. What made a Christian in New Testament times will make a Christian now. What made a church of Christ in New Testament times will make a church of Christ now. We urge that you, our friend, study the New Testament, find what made Christians in the first century, and then determine whether you are a Christian. Find the New Testament description of Christ's church, and then determine whether you are a member of it. If not, we plead that you immediately become a member of that church built by our Lord, which has existed **since A.D. 33**.

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## ***REMOVING THE ANCIENT LANDMARKS***

"Do not remove the ancient landmarks which your fathers have set" (Proverbs 22:28).

We live in a world of change. Each day sees some contribution to the intricate web of civilization. Each day sees another rung added to the ladder of progress. Scientific achievements that were regarded as beyond the realm of possibility a hundred years ago, are accepted as common today. The human race has within it a driving urge to conquer frontiers and open new realms of thought and endeavor with which the restless mind of man can grapple.

Sometimes there is a pause, as in the days of the decline of the Roman Empire, but this is but the regrouping of civilization's forces before the continued advance. Sometimes there is a recession, as in the Dark Ages, as a lion crouches before the spring. But the general trend of the human mind is an upward struggle toward a freer and fuller life. Along the road of progress lies the shattered remains of discarded systems and philosophies that failed to stand the test of time.

Man has become so charmed at the kaleidoscope of exploding ideas and disintegrating orders that he has come to distrust anything that is not of the latest design. He fails to take into consideration that no fundamental principle has ever changed and that the development has occurred in his own understanding of those principles. The same inexorable laws of nature pertain today which prevailed before man walked the earth. The law that makes two and two equal four existed before the science of numbers were born and will remain true after the universe has melted with fervent heat.

Man's fierce exaltation in his own progress has produced within him the delusion of omnipotence, believing that nothing exists which cannot be improved by the magic wand of change. This spirit has led him to try to improve upon the divine wisdom of God Almighty. But there are some things which man cannot change without accomplishing his own destruction, and religion is one of these. Yet, everywhere in Christendom we see the divine system cluttered with the tawdry trappings of man, and the flawless luster of divine revelation desecrated with human

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fingerprints. Most of the religious world is swept before one of the juggernauts of denominationalism—showy ecclesiasticism and modernism.

They have removed the ancient landmarks and invented religions of their own. They have become plants which the Heavenly Father planted not. In the words of the apostle, "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but

according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (II Timothy 4:3-4).

## **Disregard For Biblical Truth**

Most of the flagrant disregard for Biblical truth which characterizes the denominational world is based upon one or the other of two false premises. The first is the fallacious assertion that if a man is sincere, he is right. This was first predicated as a justification for religious division by the philosopher Mendelssohn and was called "the pragmatic doctrine of the possible plurality of truth." It allows scope for any and every religious belief and doctrine regardless of how foreign it may be to the teachings of the Word of God. The expression, "that's how they see it," is substituted for the divine principle of speaking as the oracles of God; and the expression, "he's honest in his belief," is given priority over the charge of an inspired apostle, as he wrote: "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and the same judgment" (I Corinthians 1:10). What men believe has become the criterion of truth, and man has set up himself as his own standard.

## **Preach The Word**

When two disagree, both cannot be right. When a person disagrees with the Bible, he must be wrong. Regardless of how good and sincere an individual he may be, if he believes contrary to the teachings of the Word of God, he is wrong. Yet, it is considered religious good manners not to point out to any man the error of his position, because he may be honest in his belief. It is considered wrong to say anything which might disturb a person's mind about the doctrines he has always held to be true.

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But woe to the gospel preacher who will compromise the truth of God! A person who has the truth and will not extend it to souls in error is an enemy of the cross and has betrayed the trust that is vested in every Christian. It is impossible to preach the true gospel without opposing false doctrines and teachings. If we preach the unadulterated gospel of Jesus Christ, we must oppose teachers of error.

Paul told the Roman church: "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17-18).

The religious world must learn that God requires obedience as well as good intentions. The principle which the prophet Samuel expressed to King Saul on that

morning three thousand years ago is still as true today: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed that the fat of rams" (I Samuel 15:22).

The servant of God must preach the simple New Testament gospel without adornment or deletion, for only thus can he lead men to unity in Christ Jesus and discharge the obligation to a lost and dying world. Only thus can he restore the ancient landmarks of truth in doctrine and practice which identify the church that Jesus built.

## **Another False Premise**

The second false premise upon which division thrives is the doctrine of expedience—that whatever the Bible has not specifically condemned, and which seems a desirable addition, is allowed in the worship of God. Since an *expedient* is a course dictated by practical wisdom, adoption of this principle throws the floodgates open to admit into the worship of God and into the organization and practice of the church anything and everything that passes the court of human judgment.

Practically every digression that has laid waste and destroyed the church of God and divided Christendom into a thousand warring factions, has been justified upon the ground of expedience. When God gives a command and specifies the way in which that

command is to be obeyed, every other way is excluded. I have never seen a Scripture forbidding the wearing of the scapular or the burning of incense as worship, but the silence of the Scriptures forbids their use. To use them would not be abiding in the doctrine of Christ, and "whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God" (II John 9).

This same principle also excludes sprinkling for baptism, infant baptism and instrumental music in the worship. All of these things have caused grievous divisions in Christendom and have robbed the church of its unity and strength. I cannot believe and practice these things because they go beyond the things which are written, as the apostle Paul warned the Corinthians to take care "that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written" (I Corinthians 4:6).

## **Speak As The Bible Speaks**

We must speak where the Bible speaks and remain silent where the Bible is silent. It is not enough to defend any belief or practice upon the ground that the Bible does not prohibit it. It must not be accepted into the church of Jesus Christ unless the Bible sanctions it. If it is not actually asserted or necessarily inferred in the Scriptures, it cannot be made a part of Christianity without doing violence to the Word of God. Any other road leads to digression and ruin.

The first little innovation is a leak in the dike. In the words of a great gospel preacher, Moses E. Lard, spoken in 1864: "The spirit of innovation never retraces its steps. When once it sets in to accomplish a certain object, accomplish that object it will, though ruin marks every step of its advance. Church history teems with proof of this."

Let us not remove the ancient landmarks set for us by the Lord and His apostles. When the church of God joins the ranks of apostasy by abandoning the ground upon which the apostles stood, when it fails to cry out against every departure from the Holy Writ, then it has ceased to be the body of Christ and must be lost in the shambles of denominationalism. Let us rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, retracing our steps to that glorious united church of the first century. Only in this unswerving, uncompromising stand is there hope of reclaiming a disillusioned world and

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restoring the ancient pattern. The little foxes of innovation will finally destroy the vine.

## **Gradual Departure**

No heresy ever came suddenly. It would have been refused and repudiated. It crept gradually and insidiously until its very familiarity gave it the stamp of genuineness. Every generation is faced with the problem of attesting the truth or error of accepted dogmas by comparing them with the word of God. The works of man are subject to change and improvement, but the Word of God was delivered perfect, emanating from the mind of the perfect Creator. We cannot improve upon it. We can only believe it, accept and follow it if we expect to be among that number that the Lord Jesus will claim for His own at His return.

## **THE APOSTASY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH**

### **Gradual Departure**

The church did not fall from its pristine perfection in a day, nor was its glory shattered by some epoch-making event, as earthly kingdoms might fall. This greatest tragedy of all history could not have been accomplished by the combined might of all earth's kings. Yet, fall it did, and this world's peoples were left spiritually impoverished at its decline. Of course, in every age there have been the few who have cried out against departures from the doctrine taught by the apostles, but they were a voice lost in the gathering storm of digression. Strictly speaking, those few constituted the true church of God, but in this study, we are considering the main course of so-called Christendom.

### **The Fountainhead**

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ in its virgin purity was simple in its teaching, its worship and its organization. The ostentation and garish pomp of a presumptuous ecclesiastical hierarchy was still centuries off, and the jewels of doctrinal truth, whose radiance filled the hearts of the early disciples, had not been buried beneath the mountains of dogma and empty theology. A congregation of the Lord's followers at the close of

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the apostolic age submitted to but one head—the Lord Jesus—and recognized but one constitution—His inspired word. Each congregation was autonomous, and was bound to all other congregations of the Lord's church by the love and fellowship common to those who serve one Master and who share one hope.

Politico-ecclesiastical power and organization, which later regimented and curbed the freedom of spirit of Christ's followers, were then unknown. Each local assembly was made up of Christians, who were all priests and saints, and there was no clerical class to arrogate to itself dominion over a subservient laity. Those disciples who gave their lives to the public proclamation of the gospel were called *evangelists*, but the term was used to describe the nature of their labors and was not conferred as a title of office, and none had yet dared to expropriate to himself God's own title of *Reverend*.

## Authority—Control

Rule in the New Testament church was limited to the elders (or bishops) in each congregation and its administration was didactic rather than political, through leadership and not by constraint. Contrary to modern belief and practice, every local assembly was under the oversight of a plurality of bishops (elders), never under a single bishop. Deacons were special servants of the congregation who attended to the eleemosynary and benevolent ministry of the church. They held office only in the *root*, and not the generally accepted sense of the term. The titles *curate, vicar, rector, archbishop, cardinal, etc.*, are as foreign to the New Testament as they are to an Indian of the Mato Grasso.

## Terms of Entrance and Worship

The terms of admission into Christ's church of the first two centuries were simple and direct. When a person professed belief in Jesus as God's Son, and was willing to turn in repentance from his sins, he was immersed for the remission of his sins, thereby becoming a Christian and a member of the Lord's body. No man or group of men had the right to vote him into the church. Adding him to the church was, and is, the exclusive prerogative of the Lord Himself. Such heresies as *probation* and *confirmation* were as yet undreamed of.

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A member of the church in its early existence participated in unadorned and straightforward acts of worship. He was not treated to the elaborate and colorful pageantry which the clergy of our day employ to charm the masses. The disciples in a particular locality assembled on every first day of the week for the express purpose of breaking bread, i.e., observing the Lord's Supper. Their place of meeting was sometimes a hall, at other times a private home, occasionally even a stone quarry. They prayed, they sang hymns, and each contributed of his money as his heart prompted him that the evangelistic and benevolent duties of the church might be carried on. Sometimes the congregation listened to a message from a visiting evangelist. At other times, they studied a portion of the Scriptures together, or received a discourse from one of their own members. Their worship service was as uncomplicated as that. Consecration of life and good works were the embellishments of Christianity rather than ceremony and Gothic architecture.

## **Departure and Its Cause**

That the church as the apostles knew it could have been seduced and debauched into the grotesque caricature which it later became is the greatest paradox of history. The divine institution which was designed to uplift and free the human spirit from the shackles of ignorance and fear became Satan's instrument for the enslavement and degradation of man's soul and mind to depths of spiritual perversion that even the imaginative depravity of pagan religions has never equaled.

Doubtless, many factors contributed to the church's forsaking the foundations laid by Christ and the apostles. The departure was a gradual crumbling rather than a collapse. Personal ambition and avarice on the part of some bishops certainly were contributory to the decay of primitive church organization. The impact of heathen religions, coupled with the influence of Jewish ceremonial observances, helped to corrupt the simplicity of Christian worship. But the primal determinant was a growing indifference to the inviolability of God's Word. Bishops, greedy for power, became increasingly impatient at the restraints laid upon them by the inspired writings. At first, they justified departures from New Testament practice upon the grounds of expedience. Later they arrogantly asserted their right to change and innovate at will.

## **Digression in Organization**

The trend from a plurality of bishops in a congregation to a single bishop was, loosely speaking, a natural course. At first, all the overseers of a congregation were called *bishops* (Gr. episkopoi) and *elders*, (presbuteroi). The former term designates their function of oversight and the latter refers to their qualifications of maturity in age and experience.

Not all these men possessed leadership in the same degree, and it inevitably followed that the congregation would lean more heavily upon the council and direction of the most capable and sagacious elder than upon his less able

colleagues. Also, he was often pushed into a position of public prominence by naturally reticent elders. Since he presided at public meetings more often than any of the other elders, the congregation came to call him the *presiding elder*. It was only a step from there to the actual installment of a permanent *president*, called the *bishop*, who wielded authority over the remaining elders, called *presbyters*. The power of the *bishop* was still congregational, however, and centuries had to pass before religious thinking had become sufficiently loose to allow the installment of bishop as *archbishop*.

Within a hundred years after the death of the last apostle, churches in one province or district formed the habit of holding conferences to discuss their common interests and endeavors. These informal meetings were nothing more than we of today would call a combined lectureship and fellowship gathering. They claimed no jurisdiction or ecumenical authority over the individual congregations represented. It seemed incredible that a gathering so seemingly innocent could have spelled the doom of congregational autonomy, and yet that is just what happened.

## **The Ultimate Digression**

To preserve order in the assembly of delegates, it became necessary to select a chairman. At first, any bishop could serve in that capacity, but the tendency was to appoint some well known bishop of one of the large city congregations to the chair. This culminated in the practice of selecting the bishop of the largest city as the permanent chairman. He was referred to as the *metropolitan bishop* (i.e., chief-city bishop).

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In time the nature of the conference itself changed. The recommendations gradually became directives and the directives became laws. As the power of the association increased, so did the position of the metropolitan become more authoritative until this proud prelate became archbishop over a province. Later, a bitter struggle was to ensue between the various metropolitans for supremacy, out of which the Roman bishop was to emerge in brazen effrontery as the vicar of Christ on earth.

## **Doctrinal Departure**

Concurrent with the corruption of church government were a constantly growing avalanche of departures in doctrine and worship. With the shepherds of the Lord's people, the congregational elders, stripped of their authority, and with respect for the all-sufficiency of God's Word cast to the winds, there remained no bulwark to check the juggernaut of digression. The Christian world was swept into a maelstrom of religious slavery and spiritual oppression that held most of the western civilization in its paralyzing grasp for centuries. An ecclesiastical dictatorship controlled every phase of human endeavor, from the king in his castle to the serf who toiled in his field. Study of the Bible and freedom of religious thought was ruthlessly suppressed. Innovations, such as sprinkling for baptism

and instrumental music in the worship, which for centuries had failed to fasten themselves upon the church as standard practices, were no firmly entrenched in orthodoxy in the Western Church. The confessional replaced repentance, absolution supplanted godliness of life, and the rosary superseded prayer. The crowning blasphemy was the administration of extreme unction at death.

## **Constancy and Loyalty Reward**

Volumes have been written on the horrors of the Inquisition and the thousands whose broken bodies wasted in cheerless dungeons or perished at the stake. But those who suffered martyrdom were the victors. In an enslaved world, they were the only really free, for the bondage of the mind and soul is the ultimate imprisonment. They dared to think and to die for the testimony of Christ, and so kept alive the flickering candle of hope through the long night of the Dark Ages until the Reformation dawned to stir a lost world from the slumber of centuries.

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