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Preservation, Restoration, Reformation

Hugh Nibley

with an introduction by Bert Fuller

Introduction

EARLY IN HIS ACADEMIC CAREER Hugh Nibley composed a 446-page manuscript that he entitled “The End of What?”¹ As in related work, such as his KSL radio series *Time Vindicates the Prophets*,² Nibley marshaled an onslaught of quotations, allusions, and intertexts, primarily from ancient sources, to argue that the original Christian church went out of existence as the gift of prophecy faded. Given that Nibley never substantially revised the manuscript, it should not surprise readers that “The End of What?” often follows a meandering path. And yet, to read Nibley’s commentaries, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge once said of the great tragic actor Edmund Kean, is like reading church history by flashes of lightning.

1. Currently unpublished, with the exception of what follows. The manuscript is preserved as typescript in Hugh Nibley, Hugh Nibley Papers, MSS 2721, box 177, folder 8, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. You can view or download the original transcript of this excerpt at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/periodical/sba-v7-2015>.

2. Published later as Hugh Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, CWHN 3 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987).

Near the end of the manuscript, lightning continues to flash in a section labeled “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation.”³ Nibley begins with the classic criticisms of Celsus, surveys early patristic anxieties about the loss of prophecy—referencing Eusebius, Epiphanius, Justin Martyr, and Philastrius among others—and moves to Jerome’s solemn realization that the prophetless church, subject as any other institution to internal betrayals and external assaults by barbarians, has lost its privileged position—“no longer the body of the elect that its name implies; it is now the universal catch-all.” Throughout “Preservation,” Nibley frequently invokes his sources in idiosyncratic ways, creating some tendentious connections and at times proffering tenuous translations. But this style has two clear benefits. First, the unpolished nature of the piece gives readers a glimpse into Nibley’s workshop. Notorious for endless revisions, Nibley doubtless would have reworked “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation” beyond recognition if he had prepared it for publication, hiding away what are now its more obvious seams. And these seams can be instructive for analyzing the tighter rhetoric that Nibley employs elsewhere. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the essay is a bricolage from which Nibley drew to fortify his work on church history that did see publication. Because Nibley’s published work on the early church could sometimes baffle readers,⁴ there is a good deal to be gained from studying Nibley’s unpublished pieces in light of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (nineteen volumes), especially when the two come into close textual contact with each other.

For example, in “The Passing of the Primitive Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme,” Nibley, citing Kirsopp Lake, famously remarked that Robert Browning’s “Death in the Desert” is “the best background reading for understanding the state of mind of the church at

3. This section comprises manuscript pages 381–409. Here it has been edited for length, and “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation” reproduces pages 381–99.

4. See Hans J. Hillerbrand, “The Passing of the Church: Two Comments on a Strange Theme,” *Church History* 30/4 (1961): 481–82; R. M. Grant, “The Passing of the Church: Comments on Two Comments on a Strange Theme,” *Church History* 30/4 (1961): 482–83; and the preceding article by Louis Midgley.

the passing of the apostles—all is lost.”⁵ Given the range of ancient texts within Nibley’s reach, why would a nineteenth-century English poem be the best background reading for understanding first-century history? In “The Passing of the Primitive Church,” this comment concludes number eighteen of the forty themes and describes first-generation Christians as having a bleak outlook for the future church. If we look at a similar passage in “Preservation” (see p. 89 below), we find the same reference to Browning but within a different context. Here the primary interlocutor is Celsus, whose lost book survives only through Origen’s quotations. Though Nibley the apologist would likely have been inclined to systematically refute Celsus’s dismissal of Christianity as Origen had, Nibley instead takes this opportunity to lend credence to Celsus’s concern: divided into countless sects, second-century Christians must not belong to the original unified church; each sect claims apostolic lineage, but none of them can satisfy truth seekers since there is no clear sign of authenticity anywhere (that is, no living prophets). In fine, Nibley agrees with the pagan argument; Origen of course does not.

This point, in relation to Browning, is significant for at least three reasons. First, although Nibley must rely mostly on patristic texts such as Origen’s for his argument, he reads them with suspicion when they argue for the legitimacy of what some call proto-orthodox Christianity. Since Nibley’s thesis is that the truthfulness of the apostolic church had passed, he perforce recognizes the need to perform resistant readings against the dominant record. Truth in the matter does not come solely from trusted *auctores* but from potentially any source, pagan or Victorian. A second point, related to the first, is the fact that Nibley respects the reality of lost records. *The True Word* by Celsus is lost, preserved only in part by an antagonistic respondent, but its fragmented claims are important to Nibley’s argument. To make better use of Celsus, Nibley needs not only to see through Origen’s appropriations but also to re-create, however incompletely, something of the ethos and milieu of *The True Word* through an act of the imagination. A convincing imaginative act

5. See Hugh Nibley, *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, CWHN 4 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 176.

is what good poets can provide, and Nibley found Browning envisioning the mood suitably. A third point, in reconsidering this passage for “The Passing of the Primitive Church,” Nibley removed not only the explicit digs at Origen but those against Irenaeus and Justin Martyr as well. The tighter paragraph in “Passing” does less finger pointing, focusing rather on elegiac sentiments from early church members. This move is an improvement, a detail worthy of attention because it represents perhaps a more charitable engagement with the source material. But without the Browning reference, there would be no obvious reason to read these two passages together, and the shift in register would be lost.

Another contact point between “Preservation, Restoration, Reformation” and the Collected Works comes near the end, when Nibley cites F. M. Powicke: “‘The church is always running after the saints,’ says Powicke, ‘so she can control them’” (see pp. 102–3 below). Powicke makes three appearances in *The World and the Prophets* (see chapters 22, 23, and 31), and each reference is to a single essay, “The Christian Life [in the Middle Ages]” (1951). One reference uses the same quotation as here in “Preservation,” though corrected (“‘The Church is constantly hastening after the saints, . . .’ says Powicke, ‘so it may . . . control them’”). When we compare Nibley’s use of the same quote, how he drafted it into “Preservation” apparently from memory, it becomes clear that “The End of What?” is a staging ground and should be read as such. To expect its arguments to have the completeness of some of the essays in the Collected Works might be like expecting a half-finished building to keep one warm through winter. But the secrets of monuments often come from excavating their foundations—like the newly publicized Easter Island discoveries⁶—and careful consideration of unpublished work like “Preservation” can further illuminate what Nibley was after in his more polished pieces.

In the following transcript, very few editorial changes have been made to the words Nibley himself wrote. Abbreviations have been expanded, punctuation and capitalization have been standardized, and

6. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-2149846/Hidden-treat-The-Easter-Island-heads-BODIES.html>.

obvious errors or obscurities emended. Substantive editorial additions and notes are placed in square brackets. Nibley provides almost no sources for his citations. Source citations, where possible, have been supplied by the editors, but are partial and at times tentative. Except in the case of common works, references to early Christian authors are keyed to *Patrologia Latina* and *Patrologia Graeca*, since these are the editions Nibley himself used; in fact, the volumes of the *Patrologiae* in the Harold B. Lee Library contain much Niblean marginalia. While the mutilation of library materials should never be encouraged, oftentimes the presence of Nibley's notes made the identification of sources somewhat easier. What's more, since almost everything Nibley wrote deserves attention, working with marginalia further reinforced the argument of this introduction: lasting insights into Nibley's thought frequently come when one reads both the published and unpublished work as being in a symbiotic relationship.

Bert Fuller is a PhD student in medieval studies at the University of Toronto.

IN HIS FAMOUS WORK, *The Truth about the Christians*, one of the charges Celsus brings against the Christians is that, whereas “in the beginning, when the Christians were few in number they all thought alike; but when they became numerous and spread out everywhere they divided into sects, each of which claimed the depository of the pure old original form of Christianity passed down from the beginning, while all the others were upstarts and innovators.”¹ This is a very serious charge to have been brought against the church before the year 200. It is well enough known that this was to be the fate of the church in later years, but is this, delivered possibly in the second century, just a smear? Origen has the last word—Celsus is dead and gone, and Origen is speaking to a Christian world waiting eagerly to hear his rebuttal. It is a surprising one—he says, in the first place, that though of course the church was small at the *very* beginning, it immediately became very large, with people following Jesus in vast numbers because of his powerful preaching. So Celsus is wrong on his first point—the church was *never* small.² He is also wrong on his second point, according to Origen, for the church *was never of one mind!*³ Opinions differed from the *first*, as can be seen from the disagreements among the apostles themselves. And what is wrong with that? Origen would like to know—do not philosophers and medics disagree, and is it not by disagreement that they come to that discussion and investigation that gets to the bottom of things? No serious and vital institution is without such disagreements, he says, and since there are among the Christians many trained in Greek philosophy, “it is *necessary* for them to group themselves into sects. . . and to name themselves after the leaders who they believe interpret the truth best. . . . Why therefore should we not excuse even *heresies* found among the Christians?”⁴

This sort of answer was the best that could be given in light of the facts as Origen knew them—it is *not* an answer to delight the church of a later day. The important thing, of course, is not Origen’s explanation

1. Origen, *Cels.* 3.10 (PG 11:932).

2. Origen, *Cels.* 3.10 (PG 11:932).

3. Origen, *Cels.* 3.11 (PG 11:932–33).

4. Origen, *Cels.* 3.12–13 (PG 11:933–36).

for conditions, but his admission that they existed. From the very first, Origen admits, there had been sects, and each of these naturally thought it had the pure old doctrine. Groups claiming that they *preserve* the faith in its purity are not to be distinguished from those claiming a call to *restore* or *revive* it and those coming forward to reform it.

Preservation, revival, and reformation are the constant preoccupations of churchmen throughout the world from the first century on. That is extremely significant. One might expect some crackpot along about the fifth century to suspect that the true faith had disappeared—but that all the leaders of the church should have had to wrestle with this problem from the first demands the close and respectful consideration which it has never received. First to notice is the eager, pathetic concern of the people of the church, lay and clergy, for the survival or preservation of the old apostolic church. We have seen that the fathers of the fourth century looked back on the Christianity of the good old days, of which—Basil, John and Gregory tell us—not a shred remains. We have seen how concerned the leaders of the church and the general public were after the Council of Nicaea. But that kind of concern had already become traditional in the church: the failing of the spiritual gifts had long had a disquieting effect. “The general opinion of Christians in those days,” says John Kaye speaking of the time of Tertullian, “founded as they conceived on apostolic authority, was that the spirit of prophecy would remain in the Church, until the second coming of Christ. They felt, therefore, a predisposition to lend an attentive ear to one who assumed the character of a prophet.”⁵

This strong predisposition to accept Gnosticism, Montanism, Manichaeism, etc., clearly shows how hungry the people of the church were for something which the church was no longer giving them. The shallow imposition of Montanus was greeted by cries of tearful joy not only by the rank and file but by the man who knew more about the primitive church than perhaps any other man alive—Tertullian himself, who

5. John Kaye, *The Ecclesiastical History of the Second and Third Centuries, Illustrated from the Writings of Tertullian*, 2nd ed. (London: Griffith Farran Browne, 1845), 7.

became an ardent convert and worker in the Montanist cause.⁶ A century later Eusebius was deeply moved by a sense of yearning, a lingering hope that “there might be something to it,” when he contemplated Montanism.⁷ Tertullian’s activities as “a fanatical protagonist of the new movement” were a “recognition of spiritual prophetism in opposition to the newly formed officialdom of the church.”⁸ But neither the Montanists nor Tertullian thought for a moment of their church as a “new movement.” For them it was simply the old church preserved. We have seen that the Gnostics (of which Montanism is only another expression) insisted that they had the *gnosis*, which the main church had lost. The Marcosians, among the Gnostics, had tried to make it appear that they *still* had the gift of prophecy, and took drugs and practiced special exercises to get themselves “inspired.” Simon made magical imitations of the apostles’ miracles. Valentinius faked revelation. It was all phony, yet everyone rushed over to the Gnostics. Just so with Montanism—it was a fake, and in time Tertullian, being an honest seeker, found out that it was a fake—but that same honesty would not let him remain in the big church either. It was to be the same story with the Manichaeans. They filled with the shreds and tatters of Oriental mysticism a vacuum which the main church could not fill at all, and so the great Augustine, born and raised a Christian, for the nine most enthusiastic years of his life, was their ardent disciple, as Tertullian had been of the Montanists. And for the same reason: because they offered something which both men felt deeply that the *true* church *should* have, but which the main church certainly did *not* have.

All along in the early days we find upstart sects claiming to be “apostolic.” Had not Celsus said (and Origen did not deny it) that every sect in his day claimed to be the pure original church while all others were upstarts? All the fuss about Papias and Polycarp is significant.

6. See Kaye, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6–10.

7. Cf. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.27; 5.3, 14, 18.

8. In *The Cambridge Ancient History, XII. The Imperial Crisis and Recovery, A.D. 193–337*, ed. S. A. Cook, F. E. Adcock, M. P. Charlesworth, and N. H. Baynes (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 537.

Irenaeus, in proving that *he* represented the old apostolic church, put forth as an argument—his main one—that *once* as a young child he had actually *seen* Polycarp. He was thus a living link with the apostles, for Polycarp had seen John.⁹ Well might Kirsopp Lake say that the best commentary on the times is Browning's "Death in the Desert."¹⁰ Papias, says Eusebius, "while he does not claim ever to have seen or heard an apostle," took careful notes from all "the elders" who were eyewitnesses, not being overjoyed like everybody else at every wild report that went the rounds; he would "ask for specific reports on what Andrew, Peter, Phillip, Thomas, James, John, Matthew, or any other of the disciples had said or done."¹¹ A strange precaution if apostolic authority were to survive undiminished. Stranger still that the apostles themselves, as Eusebius notes with wonder, took no interest in the vital work of recording their thoughts and revelations—nay, seemed to have an actual antipathy towards doing what would of all things help the church most if the church were to carry on through the centuries. Papias frankly states that he prefers the living voice to what is in the books.¹² "It would be worthwhile," Eusebius reflects, "to have such a collection of ancient sayings and miracles as that which Papias made."¹³ Among such things, once taught by the elders but in Eusebius's time completely dropped, was the teaching of the millennium.¹⁴ Why had the church not kept Papias's priceless book? In the middle of the second century, Justin commented at length upon the great variety and number of Christian sects, almost all of whom he considers to be good and bona fide Christians. Trypho notes, however, that there are also among the Christians "men who confess Jesus and are called Christians, but who I learn eat food offered to idols, and claim that there is no harm in that." Justin's reply is

9. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.

10. Kirsopp Lake, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), 62.

11. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.2–4.

12. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.4.

13. [This is an incorrect or misattributed quotation; Eusebius says clearly that Papias's work was extant (*Hist. eccl.* 3.39.1).]

14. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.39.11–13.

that there are indeed “many who confess Jesus the crucified yet follow not his teachings, but rather those that come from the spirits of error, but *we* are the disciples of the *true* and *pure* teaching of Jesus Christ, being more firm and faithful in the hope announced by him.”¹⁵ This is exactly what Celsus said—that there were many sects, and each claimed to be the *pure* church and accused the others of being impure.

The Montanists claimed that they were salvaging the primitive church—the powerful testimony of Tertullian gives them a pretty good case. In their wickedness they also claimed, wrote Urbanus, “that every bit and all of the church under the whole heaven was teaching blasphemy.” On the other hand, “they call us catholics slayers of the prophets because we do not receive their idiotic prophecies.”¹⁶ This is Celsus’s accusation again: each sect takes comfort in the biblical prediction that there would be false prophets—that takes care of the opposition, *they* are the predicted false prophets for sure, *we* are the pure old church. The thing that most strongly appealed to Tertullian and others was the Montanist claim that somewhere in the world at least *prophecy* still survived. For to them prophecy was the hallmark of God’s presence among men. It was a great hunger for prophecy, says Eusebius, which caused the Cataphrygian heresy to spread like wildfire, and after the main church won a smashing victory over it, Montanus came along to carry on the tradition, “babbling and speaking foreign things, prophesying in opposition to the tradition and succession of church practice from above. . . . Then *everybody*, as if glorying in the possession of the Holy Spirit and the gift of prophecy, forgetful of their contradicting the Lord, began to ‘prophesy.’”¹⁷ But prophecy was not everything: the Montanists also placed great store by their claim to possess the apostolic office. “Among us,” writes Jerome, “bishops hold the place of the apostles: but *they* put the bishop in third place. Their highest office is that of patriarch in Pepuza; the second rank they call *genonas*, and the bishops come third.”¹⁸ Part of their old-church

15. Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 35.

16. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.16.9, 11.

17. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.16.7–8.

18. Jerome, *Ep.* 41.1.

practice was an insistence on purity and a consequent embarrassment at having to admit they were defective in it, says Jerome, “whereas we when we do penitence are very easily promised forgiveness.”¹⁹

It is interesting that the Montanists chose not the old Jerusalem but a place amid the mountains of the West in which to await the second coming. Plainly this refers to a genuine Old Christian tradition, for despite all the charges of inconsistency and absurdity thrown at the Montanists, no one ever thinks to criticize or see anything wrong with the idea that they should choose a desolate spot in the hills of western Asia Minor. “And they say that the Jerusalem shall come down from above to that spot. For which reason they repair thither to perform their mysteries in that place, where they claim they perform holy ordinances.”²⁰ They said that they were the prophets which God had promised to send to the people before the second coming and that they had all the gifts and powers of the primitive church. There was nothing wrong with the claims. Everyone felt there should be such a church—but making the claim and proving it were two different things. “It is plain,” writes Epiphanius, “that they do not have the real charismatic gifts, for they go out of their way to argue, persisting in the spirit of error and wild imaginings.”²¹ If their gifts were genuine, he asks, “why have none since Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla had them? Maximilla said, ‘After me there will be no prophecy, but all shall be completed.’ Yet the end did *not* come after her time, which was many years ago. That proves her a false prophetess.”²² Throughout the East conferences were held everywhere to discuss Montanism. That such a feeble performance could have so impressed the Christian world is an eloquent commentary on the poor diet the Big Church was giving it.

The tradition, beginning with the Gnostics and passing down to the Cataphrygians and Montanists, *never ceased* from the Christian world; in *every century* it rankles. “There are many,” says Philastrius in

19. Jerome, *Ep.* 41.1.

20. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.14.1–2.

21. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.1.5, 7.

22. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.2.1–7.

the late fourth century, “who daily assert that there are prophets, and who preach that there should be prophecy, not knowing that ‘The Law and the Prophets’ were up to John the Baptist (Matthew 11:13), and that the end of the law and the prophets was completed in the presence of Christ, and thereby consummated.”²³ These people, knowing full well that the apostles were prophets, could not see how the successor to an apostle could be anything but a prophet, unless such a succession was only to certain apostolic functions and not to all of them. Methodius mocks the pretensions of Justin of Naples as “a man no nearer to the apostles than the rest of us either in time or in virtue.”²⁴ Proximity to the apostles had become a norm of truth—a riskier one could not be imagined, since the very churches to which the apostles wrote their letters stood on very shaky ground. Mani was absolutely crazy, Eusebius believes, for “he said he was the Paraclete and like Christ anointed himself twelve apostles.”²⁵ Crazy he may have been, yet he appealed to the best in Augustine, who during the happiest years of his life was a devoted and ardent disciple, believing he had found in Mani true Christianity; yet when he left the Manichaeans, he says, the bottom of his world fell out and he spent the ensuing years in black despair. His attitude to the catholic church, even after he joined it, was one of caution, reserve, and to quote Troeltsch, “abysmal pessimism.”²⁶ Socrates describes the Novatians as trying to be primitive Christians.²⁷ Pacianus makes fun of them for avoiding the name *Novatians* and blushing when it was applied to them: they would be primitive Christians and nothing else. “Why do you scold us for using rhetoric and quoting Virgil?”²⁸ he asks his Novatian friend: the answer would be that the primitive Christians would have done the same.

23. Philastrius, *Haer.* 78 (PL 12:1189).

24. Methodius, *Res.* 4.6 (PG 18:313).

25. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.31.1.

26. See Ernst Troeltsch, *Augustin, die Christliche Antike und das Mittelalter* (Berlin: Oldenbourg, 1915).

27. See Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 4.28.

28. See Pacian, *Ep.* 2.4 (PL 13:1059–60).

When they weren't actually claiming to be direct descendants of the first church, men and groups would still continue to claim a degree of inspiration which aimed at *restoring* that church. At the end of the second century, "once again arose, loud and penetrating, the cry to establish life on the ground of the expectation of the Lord's speedy return. There were congregations which, led by their bishops, withdrew to the desert; there were congregations which sold all their possessions in order to be able to meet the coming Christ."²⁹ But if these were departing from the main church, it was the church more than they, according to Harnack, which really departed from the old Christian traditions: "The church herself . . . entered the world-state by the open door in order to establish herself permanently, to preach Christianity in its streets. . . . In the middle of the third century we find the church furnished with all the forces that a state and its culture could offer her, entering on all the relations of life, and *ready for any concession which did not concern her creed*."³⁰ The last qualification is one which every church historian must make in order to save anything at all of the real church, but it is a qualification in word only, without any support in fact. An examination of the doings and decisions of the councils through the centuries will show clearly enough that one cannot separate creed from practice and that once the church begins to compromise there is no limit. A church which was willing to make *any* concessions to the world is not the same as a church that would make *none*. It was a church that wanted to eat its cake and have it, too.

But as Harnack notes, the main church was by no means the *only* church; it was *never* universal, because there were *always* Christian groups that challenged its claims. Athanasius reports the crazy Phrygians as insisting that the full truth was first revealed to them, and "that the faith of the Christians actually began with them."³¹ This is simply the claim that *they* are the pure old church. In that case, says Athanasius,

29. Adolf Harnack, *Monasticism: Its Ideals and History*, trans. E. E. Kellett and F. H. Marseille (London: Williams and Norgate, 1901), 27.

30. Harnack, *Monasticism*, 28–29.

31. Athanasius, *Syn.* 4 (PG 26:688).

what of the fathers and the blessed martyrs and those who descend in their faith from them? There is an ominous note in Basil's announcement that the corruption that is spreading like wildfire through the whole church only began in the East: "The gospel began with us, and so did also the seeds of apostasy, spreading from here throughout the entire *oecumene*."³²

This awareness of general and universal corruption in the church could only inspire the enthusiasm of the sects to salvage the True Gospel from the wreckage. The main church, in its glory, had simply failed to deliver, and everybody knew it. After Montanus, says Bardy, after the passing of the Gnostic, "for a long time yet, after the first disillusionment, there could still be found Christians, even bishops, only too eager to let themselves be fooled by new promises: every announcement of the end of the world provoked a crisis which the calmer spirits could cure only by dint of great effort."³³ This was not an isolated phenomenon, limited to a few crackpots and extremists—it was and ever remained a major threat to the church. Eusebius tells us, for example, of a bishop Nepos in Egypt, who tried to revive the old doctrine of the millennium using Revelation as a text. The bishop of Alexandria opposed Nepos bitterly, though he greatly admired his pure character and his great gift for writing hymns. (Another annoying fact: it was not the worst, but the best and most gifted men who most often expressed discontent with the main church.) The trouble with Nepos, says Eusebius, was that he was too literal-minded and naïve. If Christ and the apostles were still here, says Eusebius, we could ask them about these things. In their absence, however, the best we can do is to put an allegorical interpretation on the scripture and make it fit our needs. Nepos was therefore taking unfair advantage when he wrote his book *Refutation of the Allegorizers*, calling for continued apostolic authority.³⁴

32. Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 243.3 (PG 32:908).

33. Gustave Bardy, *La conversion au christianisme durant les premiers siècles* (Paris: Aubier, 1949), 311.

34. See Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 7.24.1–5.

Again, in the time of Origen and Clement of Alexandria, one Judas “went off the track with the crazy idea that the *parousia* of the Antichrist was then at the doors.” Of course Daniel was his guide, and his book caused an immediate sensation, “stirring up terribly the forces of persecution that were against us at that time and throwing the masses into complete confusion.”³⁵ The rude and simple, literal-minded people who followed Novatus called themselves the Katharoi—those who had kept themselves pure and regarded all others as being out of the church—for *they* were the true Christian church. Novatus regarded himself, says Eusebius, “as the fixer of dogma, the defender (shield-bearer) of ecclesiastical knowledge.”³⁶ The title of *hyperaspistes* shows that Novatus thought of his function as primarily a preservative one. A Novatian tract, held up to ridicule by Pacianus, says that ever since the Decian persecution the line of descent from Christ had been interrupted, and the outrageous thing is that *he* felt called to put things right again: “Novatians to the rescue! Justice will be liberated! By the authority of Novatian, whatever is wrong will be said right!”³⁷ “The Lord has sent *me*,” Maximilla announced to the world, “for this work of preaching, and, whether I will or not, to learn the gnosis of God as one set apart, a mouthpiece, an interpretress—forced to be such whether I will or no.”³⁸ This, says Epiphanius in a feeble rebuttal, proves she was a false prophetess, for Christ came of his own free will! Apparently preachers must always be self-chosen on that pattern. Epiphanius speaks of other sects calling themselves apostolic; their sacraments and mysteries, he says significantly, are very different from ours. Then he says an interesting thing: “The church is like a ship, made not of one board but put together from many different ones. Yet each one of those heresies thinks it is the only timber in the ship, and so misses the whole idea of what the church is like.”³⁹ Again we find Origen’s insistence not on uniformity, but on

35. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.7.

36. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.43.8.

37. See Pacian, *Ep.* 3.1 (PL 13:1064).

38. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 48.13.1.

39. Epiphanius, *Pan.* 61.3.4–5.

variety in the church—only crackpots and extremists believe the church should be a one-piece vessel.

While the councils continued to wrangle, and revivalists and sectarians sought to get the church back on the old track—their track—another interesting development was taking place within the church. The journal that Lady Sylvia (now known for the first time by her right name of Aetheria [Egeria]) kept during her pilgrimage in the Holy Land about the year 380 is one of the most remarkable documents in existence.⁴⁰ What the good woman is seeking is tangible contact with the holy ones of old—and that is what she finds, infallibly and delightfully, wherever she goes. All the locations mentioned in the Old and New Testaments are awaiting her inspection at their proper and official places. The bush that had burned for Moses was still thriving and covered with blossoms. One might enter and pray in the cave in which Jesus was born, in which he was raised, in which he taught his disciples, in which he was transfigured (!), in which he ate the last supper, in which he was buried, met with his disciples after the resurrection, and finally the *cave* in which the Lord ascended to heaven. It was a great time for cave cults. Grottos have always played a major role in popular religion around the Mediterranean, and Christianity gladly complied. In every page of Sylvia's travels we meet with the deep yearning for some *tangible* connection with the Bible to offset the allegorical pap that was disgusting the revivalists but which was the only reality the church had to offer. The quest of the Middle Ages was on.

In fourteenth-century Ghent, "after each Mass was a sermon, lasting an hour and a half: the monks and the priests tried to show the great similitude between them and the people of Israel . . . who have been kept in bondage by the Earl of Flanders."⁴¹ In the East, in Egypt and Syria, every popular uprising for liberation from the hated Western rule and culture was in the name of restoring the true old church as, from the fourth century on, "old national Oriental traditions revived"

40. Egeria, *Itinerarium*.

41. Jean Froissart, *Chroniques: Tome dixieme, 1380–1382*, ed. Gaston Raynaud (Paris: Renouard, 1897), 221.

and opposition to Hellenic culture intensified. The general corruption of the church, in fact, seems to have been taken as an axiom through the Middle Ages. In vain the main church sneered and mocked at little separatist groups—"You think that you are the only people on earth who receive the exhortations of the Holy Ghost, but *we* can show you that the Holy Ghost speaks to that church which is universal, for does not the Psalm say 'Let *all the earth* sing a song to God?' But you alone of all the inhabitants of the earth pride yourselves on being different from all the rest and claim that you alone have the right to receive that order." It was in vain, because for all the silly sophistical arguments to show that the true church *must* be the biggest church, the fact remained that as long as even the littlest Christian community existed to challenge her claims, the Catholic Church could *not* claim to be universal. Even more obvious was that God's people in the days of Israel, as in those of the apostles, *did* pride themselves on being a small and peculiar—*not* large and universal—people. Against the logical and rhetorical appeals of the schoolmen the revivalists could set the whole scripture.

That the claims of the heretics who made the loss of the true church and the true authority their theme were not wild vaporings was clearly seen in the attitude that the leaders of the main church itself took whenever things really went bad. As long as things went their way, Basil and Chrysostom, Jerome, Hilary, Eusebius, etc., could be very magnificent, indulging in a full-hearted and typically Mediterranean gloating over all opponents of the church. But when sudden reverses of fortune abolished security in a night, they all reverted to the Old Eschatology and took to conning Revelation and Daniel, and suddenly remembered that they were members of a faithful and persecuted little band that looked not to the Things of this World. In short, it was not only the crackpots who remembered that the church should have been something very different from what it had become—deep down, everybody knew it.

Nothing is more natural than that men in times of grave calamity should come to view all the things of this world—its hopes and promises and rewards—as a snare and a delusion. The well-known "pessimistic literature" of the Egyptians is of great age and "seems to have sprung

up under the influence of the catastrophes which overwhelmed Egypt at the close of the Sixth Dynasty.”⁴² The great name in this category of composition, one who might well be called the father of pessimistic literature, is Nefer-Rohu [Neferty], who while he declares that the world has reverted to barbarism, prophesies that a King will come who will drive out the Asiatics, defend Egypt by a wall, and bring to the land a rule of righteousness in which evil will vanish.⁴³ It was the persecutions of the second and third centuries, according to Caspari, that led the church forever after to conceive of the Antichrist as primarily a political figure;⁴⁴ after the fourth century the medieval “Endchrist” was developed, the Antichrist who would follow the fall of the Roman Empire. Accordingly, when things went wrong the churchmen would always remember the Antichrist and were ever ready to tag the label on anyone who displeased them much.

Persecution, says Voelker, was followed by a reawakening of the old *enthusiasmos*, which was the quaint and old-fashioned quality of the primitive church of which the second generation had, according to historians, so wisely rid itself.⁴⁵ The church that Tertullian left because it displayed the forms while it denied the power of godliness only took that unfortunate stand because it had to—it denied the gifts not on grounds of theory but of fact. It *did* not have them, therefore, since it claimed to be the true church, it could only insist that the true church *should* not have them. But nothing is more comical than to see the rush and scurry of the churchmen of the age to claim for their church

42. Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), 24b.

43. See “The Prophecy of Neferti,” in Alan H. Gardiner, “New Literary Works from Ancient Egypt,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 1 (1914): 100–106; Adolf Erman, *Ancient Egyptian Poetry and Prose*, trans. Aylward M. Blackman (London: Methuen, 1927), 110–15.

44. C. P. Caspari, *Briefe, Abhandlungen und Predigten aus den zwei letzten Jahrhunderten des kirchlichen Altertums und dem Anfang des Mittelalters* (Christiana: Malling, 1890), 429–72.

45. Walther Voelker, “Von welchen Tendenzen liess sich Eusebius bei Abfassung seiner ‘Kirchengeschichte’ leiten?” *Vigiliae Christianae* 4 (1950): 157–80, at 172.

anything at all that might be interpreted as a miracle. When a Roman army in Germany was saved from dying of thirst by a providential shower of rain, everybody hastened to give his own church credit for the “miracle.” Dio Cassius credits it to the prayers of the Egyptian magician Arnuphius who was with the army; on the Antonine column it is attributed to Jupiter Pluvius; and since there were Christians in the army, Tertullian attributes the rain to *their* prayers.⁴⁶ The pathetic “miracles” in Augustine are of the same order. The way these coincidences are exploited by the fathers clearly indicates that—however loudly they may have protested that only fools and fanatics insist on the survival of the spiritual gifts—the church knows perfectly well that those gifts belong to it by right and should always be there. The recent phenomenal rains and the lights in the sky, says Tertullian, “are signs of the imminent wrath of God; we must preach and announce and beseech while yet the time remains to us.”⁴⁷ Eusebius was absolutely convinced from his studies that the gift of prophecy *must* remain in the church until the second coming of Christ, and his great charge against the Montanists is not that they claimed that gift—he was rather impressed by that—but that if they ever had it they had lost it.

The great troubles that accompanied the Arian controversy naturally drove many to think as old Christians in the days of trial and persecution. “*This*,” says Athanasius, “is the *greatest persecution* the church has ever known. They are attacking our ancient traditions!”⁴⁸ He quite forgets that what the real saints were persecuted for was not their traditions but their innovations. Viewing the state of the church, Hilary can only declare—this is it!

Christ is to be expected, because the Antichrist is here. The pastors lament, because the hirelings have fled . . . the thieves have entered in, and the ravaging lion is abroad. The angel of Satan had transformed himself into an angel of light. Such a persecution it is as

46. See Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 72.9; Tertullian, *Apol.* 5.6.

47. Tertullian, *Scap.* 3.2–3.

48. [Perhaps a paraphrase; cf. Athanasius, *Decr.* 1–2.]

has never been since the beginning of the world. God will cut the time short; let us endure to the end. Let us suffer with Christ that we may reign with him. I have long foreseen this terrible time.⁴⁹

This is the language not of the Victorious World Church, but of the suffering Old Church of brief duration and no worldly expectations. It is notable that what these men call the *greatest* persecutions are not persecutions by the pagan monster on the imperial throne—not a bit of it. The *real* persecution is what Christians are doing to Christians. Lactantius's preoccupation with the predictions of Revelation is meticulous and exact: no modern-day revivalist ever took the Apocalypse of John more literally than the Christians of his time.⁵⁰

Another interesting tendency is to glorify the church in times of prosperity but to turn to the otherworld in times of disaster with an almost cynical disregard for *ecclesia*. In the day of her power the church is rankly worshipped—the church is the great miracle that proves the existence of God; the church is the revelation of Christ on earth; one need look no farther for his coming; the church is the kingdom of heaven; one need expect no higher glory than that apparent in her ritual, etc., etc. But a few heavy jolts to lay bare the basic instability of society and the forces of nature, and the most devout will suddenly look right through the church, their eyes focused on something far beyond. St. Basil, who feels the full impact of social disaster in his day, almost never mentions the church at all; for him it is no miraculous, self-existent, independent, mystical, eternal, supernatural entity at all. “Men are not theologians today,” he says, “but technologists. The wisdom of this world has first call on the church, pushing aside the claims of the cross. . . . The wolves are in power. The old people mourn the passing of what was; the young grow up in pitiful ignorance.”⁵¹ Because of her sins the whole church is going into bondage.

49. Hilary, *In Constantium* 1 (PL 10:577).

50. Lactantius, *Inst.* 7.15–26.

51. Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 90.2 (PG 32:473).

"I believe the mystery of iniquity is already at work," writes Cyril of Jerusalem. "I am frightened by the wars of the nations, by the schisms of the churches, by brother-love turning to brother-hate. May it not happen that these things are to be fulfilled *in our day*?"⁵² Of course he who has seen the church in her glory asks, "Will God allow it? Will he allow one to come with *all power* and lying wonders?"⁵³ Alas, is the answer, he *will* allow it "as a means of enabling the saints to win eternal glory on the other side."⁵⁴ He too, in the face of disaster, forgets the glorious future of the church and speaks the language of the other-side Christians of the early days. "The Antichrist will come when the appointed times of the Roman Empire are fulfilled and the end of the rest of the world is near."⁵⁵ When will that be? "The apostasy *is now, this is the end*."⁵⁶ Another contemporary of Nicaea, Gregory of Nazianzus, is always comparing himself to Jeremiah, the church being the Jews on the eve of their destruction. Gregory the Theologian, who was writing on the state of the church at the same time, foresees immediate end and reports present dissolution of everything: "Our order is dissolved," he says. "We have not done well to sit in exalted places. The officials, teachers of what is good to the congregation, are themselves under-nourished; our soul-doctors are themselves ailing, walking corpses teeming with every conceivable disease; our guides themselves do not know the way."⁵⁷ The church is being shaken to its foundations by the devil.

The men of the fourth century, who with great exultation foresaw church and empire moving inexorably forward side by side to the conquest of the world, had no choice when the empire was beaten time and again by the barbarians but to see in those disasters the sure presages of the End. When the empire fell, "nothing remained for Ambrose (as for

52. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 15.18; cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:7.

53. Cf. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 15.9; 2 Thessalonians 2:10.

54. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 15.17.

55. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 15.12.

56. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catech.* 15.9.

57. ["Gregory the Theologian" is another title for Gregory of Nazianzus. The intended referent here is probably the other famous Gregory of this period, Gregory of Nyssa, but the source of this citation cannot be identified.]

Jerome) but to lament the suffering of the world and the imminent End of Days.”⁵⁸ After Ambrose got control of the emperor it was in pagan rather than in Christian circles, Straub observes, that people spoke of the coming destruction of the *imperium*.⁵⁹ Prudentius boldly put forth the coming victory of the Christian emperor over the barbarians as sure proof of the divinity of the Christian religion.⁶⁰

It was therefore the Christians more than the pagans who had to undergo a violent readjustment of their thinking with the fall of the empire. Though the pattern was readily at hand—all they had to do was read the scriptures to discover intact the old eschatology which the schoolmen had brushed aside as “old wives’ tales.” But Church and World were wedded again when Augustine made the kingdom of heaven absolutely identical with the church. Henceforward one could not at will ignore the earthly failings of the church, for, being on earth, the kingdom cannot claim that it is here temporarily, by mistake, in a hostile environment—now it is fully right and proper that the kingdom endure upon earth, fully set up, in its power and glory, and [without the eschatological] otherworld nonsense. “Inextricable confusion” was a result. “Western Monasticism,” says Harnack, “in contrast to the Eastern, maintained the Apocalyptic element of Chiliasm, which, it is true, *lay dormant* for long periods, but *at critical moments constantly emerged*.”⁶¹ But while monasticism was an example of such an emergence, Harnack believed, it lost the apocalyptic element in proportion as it “allowed itself to be used by the Church.”⁶²

The church becomes the steady enemy of the old eschatology, with which it constantly has to deal. In every century the church has had to deal with the saints—those who went back to the thought patterns of the early church—by suppressing them. “The church is always running

58. Johannes Straub, “Christliche Geschichtesapologetik in der Krisis des römischen Reiches,” *Historia* 1 (1950): 57.

59. Straub, “Christliche Geschichtesapologetik,” 57–58.

60. See Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum*.

61. Harnack, *Monasticism*, 69, emphasis added.

62. Harnack, *Monasticism*, 80.

after the saints,” says Powicke, so she can control them.⁶³ Indeed, for Harnack this is the *leitmotiv* of the church history through the Middle Ages and down to the present time. Constantly people, led by the scriptures, have reverted to the old promises and concepts to which the World Church has, necessarily, a violent antipathy. Chrysostom in evil times remembers that the Lord had said “that the time had come when the door of this my bounty would be closed.”⁶⁴ Like the other fathers, he cannot admit that it has already come, but like them he is convinced that it is *very near*. His comfort is that the victory of the church is also near, but that cannot come until the end of the world. Yet this was the same John Chrysostom who time and again had gloried in the almost instantaneous victory of the apostles over all evil in the world—a complete, smashing, universal victory for the right. He reports a great earthquake in his city of Antioch and tells how it made the people very pious—the rank and file too became primitive Christians (for a few weeks) when things went wrong. There were hymns in the marketplaces and the churches were packed.⁶⁵ With his incurable fourth-century devotion to appearances, Chrysostom immediately declared that the heavenly order had been restored. After the earthquake he himself stops speaking for a while like a fourth-century rhetorician, glorying in the power and splendor of the church, and instead takes the tone of an apostolic father: “If we keep the faith unshaken by our good works, *then* we may have with us an unshaken foundation for the church.”⁶⁶ He worries no more about poor attendance at church, “for it is not a multitude of bodies we want to see in the church, but a multitude of hearkeners.” And what is this world? “A foul nest stuck together of scraps and mud. The greatest houses are no better than swallows’ nests: comes the winter and they promptly collapse. . . . Well, I say this is the winter now. God is going to

63. See F. M. Powicke, “The Christian Life,” in *The Legacy of the Middle Ages*, ed. Charles Crump (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), 39.

64. (Ps.) John Chrysostom, *In s. Bassum* 3 (PG 50:723).

65. See John Chrysostom, *De terrae motu* (PG 50:713–15); cf. *De Lazaro concio* 7.1 (PG 48:1027–28); *Hom. Acts* 7.2, 41.2 (PG 60:66, 201).

66. (Ps.) John Chrysostom, *In s. Bassum* 3 (PG 50:724); cf. *De Lazaro concio* 7.2 (PG 48:1030).

purge the world with great destructions.”⁶⁷ Christ “said that when the gospel had been preached to all nations then the end would come,” says Chrysostom, “and since the gospel *has* been preached to almost all the *oecumene* nothing remains but that the *end* is at the door. Let us fear and tremble, beloved, for the end is very near. . . . Yet we go on being trivial, vicious, and silly.”⁶⁸ “Let us build upon the rock, for the storms are coming. . . . There is great danger for those who lead the church . . . the Christian spirit must be ardent.”⁶⁹ It was the evil of the time that induced John to say these things.

Left to themselves, the fathers of the fourth century instantly gravitate into the orbit of the schools and look forward to long careers of success for themselves and prosperity for the church. It is real trouble that forces Chrysostom to say:

We go on electing unqualified men . . . so that in our day it has reached the point where, unless God very quickly snatches us from the danger and saves us and his church all will be lost. . . . Pray tell me, where do you think all these riots come from that now fill the churches? . . . All this corruption comes from the head: if the head is sick, of course the whole body will suffer. . . . Some are actually filling the churches with murder, leading whole cities to riot and revolt, all because they are fighting to be elected bishops.

Jerome is even more eloquent for the West than Chrysostom is for the East. When the hope of the empire was blasted in 378, the fathers suddenly turned to eschatology, returning to old Christian concepts, ancient *topoi*, that “the earth was unstable and the empire would surely fall.” Rome has fallen, cries Jerome, Greece has fallen. “The Orient seems to be immune from these evils, but its turn is coming next: the wolves of the north are even now attacking the eastern cities.”⁷⁰ To express his grief the saint then quotes Virgil (!) to the effect that a hundred tongues

67. John Chrysostom, *Comm. Col.* 2.4 (PG 62:314).

68. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Heb.* 21.3 (PG 63:152).

69. John Chrysostom, *Hom. Heb.* 32.2; 34.1, 3 (PG 63:222, 233, 236).

70. Jerome, *Ep.* 60.16.

could not tell his woes. And why has this happened? “Because of *our* sins the barbarians are strong. Because of *our* crimes the Roman army is beaten!”⁷¹ Civil war, in fact, is killing more than the enemy, he says. As the ancient Israelites went into bondage to Nebuchadnezzar, “so we miserable ones have so displeased God that by the rage of the barbarians his own rage is felt against us. . . . O the shame of it! The Roman army, conqueror and ruler of the world, is being chased by timid barbarians! . . . While we are dying and being overthrown every day we go right on thinking that we are indestructible.”⁷² So deeply had the lovely lesson of the indestructible heavenly order been ingrained in the thinking of the fourth century. It was impossible to believe that Roman Christian civilization was anything but God’s own world order. “Who will ever believe it?” cries Jerome, “Rome fighting on her own home territory (*in gremio suo*, “on her home base”) not for glory but for survival! Not even fighting, in fact, but rather trying to buy off her life with gold and goods. The cause for all this is that we are fighting like a lot of half-barbarians among ourselves.”⁷³ A review of Roman history follows.

As for the church, our house upon this earth as well as our home in heaven, if we are lazy and slow to good works, it will be brought low. And the whole structure which was designed to elevate to the peak of heaven shall collapse to earth, bringing ruin to its inhabitants. When our hands weaken the storms overcome us, and this is as true of the church as it is of private individuals: that through neglect of the leaders the whole structure collapses, and where there is no incentive to crime there is always found a pretense to virtue.⁷⁴

In view of the great and unexpected calamities, Jerome not only reverts to old church eschatology but actually discards the daring faith and confidence of the fourth century: that though individuals might go astray

71. Jerome, *Ep.* 60.17.

72. Jerome, *Ep.* 60.17, 19.

73. Jerome, *Ep.* 123.17.

74. [Nibley gives a slightly different translation of this in *The World and the Prophets*, CWHN 3 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 195. The citation given there appears incorrect; the correct source is unknown.]

the church never could, that though the pretenders might swarm, in the end the true church would always prevail. Now under terrible blows of misfortune, Jerome is forced to admit that if individuals can lose the light and go to ruin, so can the church. "The stake is not broken and useless and destroyed—it would be impiety to say that: but the stake is taken away from the place of the believer, that is, the church—because of daily increasing impiety."⁷⁵ The church is indeed indestructible, but that does not mean that it must always remain in the same place. Where the people are not righteous it is taken away. "This means," says Jerome commenting on Luke 18:8, "that Christ *deserts* (literally "undoes," "dis-establishes") his church because of daily increasing unrighteousness."⁷⁶ And where is this unrighteousness? Jerome agrees with his Eastern counterpart, John Chrysostom: it begins always at the top: "For it is the custom of the leaders of the churches to oppress the common people in their pride." "The pride of the important ones, the iniquity of those in charge, often drive people from the church, driving away from the Lord those who he himself hath saved. . . . That is why there is a famine in the lands, a famine to hear the word of God."

But how could the church expect to be free of wickedness and still be a world church? Jerome realizes the difficulty of the problem. "It needs must be that in the net of the whole church should be both good and bad. For if all were pure, what would be left over to the judgment of God?" This weak and silly argument was the common answer to the charges of *necessary* evil in a world church. A little thought shows its shallowness. Chrysostom uses it in a shocking way. Does the greatness, power, and wisdom of a judge depend on the number and the depravity of the criminals brought before him? "If all were pure" within the church would God's judicial functions actually be in jeopardy? If it is necessary to preserve a goodly batch of evildoers against the judgment, must such be preserved

75. Jerome, *Comm. Isaiah* 7.22 (PL 24:275).

76. [This appears to be an interpretive restatement of Jerome's comment on Luke 18:8 in *Comm. Isaiah* 7.22, just cited, and is not found in the text. In working from his notes, Nibley may have mistaken a gloss of his own on it for a further citation from Jerome. Cf. Nibley, *World and the Prophets*, 195.]

within the church? Jerome falls back on the classic argument: “The wheat and the tares must grow up together.”⁷⁷ Here he boldly corrects the Lord’s priceless interpretation of this parable—the only fully interpreted parable in the scripture: “The field is the world,” Jesus had said.⁷⁸ “I do *not* affirm that the field is the world,” says Jerome, “but I understand by the field the congregation of the Christian population.” (As if in this case Christ had left any room for this or any other interpretation.) Having put the Lord to rights, Jerome is free to continue:

Just as you find mixed wheat and tares in fields, even so in the terrestrial churches (at least he concedes that much to the Bible) you will find some wheat and some weeds. This should teach us, when sinners turn up from time to time in our congregations, not to be scandalized, nor to say: “Behold, a sinner in the holy community! If that is allowed, what is wrong with my sinning?” As long as we are in this present world, that is in the field and in the net, both good and bad are contained in it. But when Christ comes, *then* there will be a separation and 1 Corinthians 4 will be fulfilled.

But if sin is to be expected in the church, why does God persecute the church for the sinners that are in her? Why is she to be punished for that which by her very nature she cannot possibly avoid? “An angry God gives the church over to persecutions,” says Jerome, “because of vice and sinning, that she may come forth from the fuller’s fire of the world as pure as gold and silver.” Strange reasoning indeed! God insists on including all the dross and defilement of the world in his church for the sake of making it universal, and then he becomes angry and by violent means removes—to the exact amount that he once mixed it in—all the dross and defilement! The church is no longer the body of the *elect* that its name implies: it is now the universal catch-all. In the ancient times only the sheep ever heard the Master’s voice; only the gold and silver were allowed into the church, kept pure and undefiled by passing through the fires of persecution and being taken *out* of the world. The totally opposite

77. See Matthew 13:30.

78. Matthew 13:38.

doctrine of a universal world church is opposed to this and required generations of cunning lawyers and rhetoricians to make a case for it.

Having admitted that God would purge the church, Jerome is ready to treat the dangerous ground of *restoration*—ground that the fathers, without the pressure of real and violent setbacks that needed explaining, preferred to avoid. “Hence the Lord, promising again peace and mercy, says he shall return *again* to build up the church (*eam aedificaturum*, “to reestablish it”) . . . which things, foretold thus by all the prophets, refer to the celestial Jerusalem, which having been destroyed by ruin, is to be built up by virtue. Which things we more properly interpret as referring to the *church*.”⁷⁹ The church is *now* in the place of *fallen Israel*—not an enviable position, but a significant admission. Can the men whose wickedness brought about its fall qualify to reestablish the church on a heavenly foundation? Can the generations of wickedness that broke the covenant and forgot the law reestablish the law and the covenant of their own authority? The *heavenly* Jerusalem can be established from only one direction. There is no doubt that Jerome had come to this as a result of experiences almost too terrible for him to believe. With the fall of Rome, which he admits with horror and incredulity is just that and nothing else, he closely associates the fall of the church: the two formed a single society, and that society was destroyed because of its wickedness.

This desolation which we have described befalling the city of Rome we know also to have come upon every city in the world! For other regions have been desolated by calamity, others wiped out by the sword, others tortured by famine, others swallowed up by the earthquakes. *Let us therefore with all our heart and mind despise this world as a thing marked for extinction.*

What a comedown from the confidence and glory of half a century earlier!

Hugh Nibley (1910–2005) was professor of history and religion and Brigham Young University.

79. Jerome, *Comm. Zach.* 1.1 (PL 25:1426).