

TRUTH TRIUMPHANT: CHAPTER 10

How The Church Was Driven Into The Wilderness

The Goths carried back these Christian captives (from Asia Minor) into Dacia, where they were settled, and where considerable numbers embraced Christianity through their instrumentality. Ulfilas was the child of one of these Christian captives, and was trained in Christian principles. 1

THE story of the Goths enters strongly into the interpretation of the 1260-year prophetic period. When we consider the Goths and their appearance among the nations, it brings us to the name of Ulfilas.

Pen cannot picture how completely the face of Western Europe was changed by the Teutonic invasions sweeping from the east to the south and west. These continued for at least two centuries, ending in 508 when the Papacy completed its triumph over the newcomers. The inhabitants of Europe were driven into the background, as was also the general use of the Latin language, while strangers and foreign tongues reigned from the Danube to the Thames. The amount of territory of the old Roman Empire was practically halved. Profound changes took place in what remained of that empire, now limited to the eastern end of the Mediterranean. Meanwhile, in eastern Europe there was a revival of the simpler types of Christianity. The Celtic and the Gothic peoples in the West also contributed to this new evangelical era.

Great victories for Christ were won by Ulfilas (A.D. 311-383). The triumphs of this missionary were made among the nations crowded along the northern frontiers of the Roman Empire. Like Patrick of Ireland, he passed his early years in a land of captivity. Ulfilas finished his work about the time that Patrick was beginning his. There is much similarity in the beliefs and accomplishments of the two heroes.

Lucian of Antioch was at the height of his career when Ulfilas was a lad. Asia Minor, the homeland of his ancestors, was, in the early years of the church, the scene of strong opposition to those allegorizing ecclesiastics who had been loaded with imperial favors by Constantine, and who were antagonistic to Lucian's translation of the Bible and his system of teaching. Ulfilas was called to take his choice. He decided not to walk with the allegorizers. The Gothic Bible which he gave to the nations he converted follows in the main the Received Text transmitted to us by the learned Lucian.² Such early contacts and associations molded the belief and plans of Ulfilas. The Goths along the north shore of the Black Sea had pushed their boats to the southern harbors and had carded away captive the ancestors of Ulfilas who resided in Asia Minor.

Constantine II, son and successor to Constantine, did not, as previously noted, partake of his father's views, and he had thrown the aegis of imperial protection around the other party which was branded by the church at Rome as Arians. To these he had granted full religious liberty. What was the attitude of Ulfilas toward the disputes over the Godhead which had convulsed the Council of Nicaea? The historian W. F. Adeney says:

There is no reason to doubt that Ulfilas was perfectly honest in the theological position he occupied. As an earnest missionary, more concerned with practical evangelistic work than with theological controversy, he may have been thankful for a simple form of Christianity that he could make intelligible

to his rough fellow countrymen more easily than one which was involved in subtle Greek metaphysics.
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Although the Goths refused to believe as the church at Rome did, and as a consequence have been branded as Arians, Romanism actually meant little to them. In fact, it meant little to Ulfilas, their great leader. 4 The Goths refused to go along with the mounting innovations being introduced into the church of the caesars, which church quickly branded any competitor Arian. They were, above all, a warlike people before the coming of Ulfilas. The greatest struggle this apostle had with the Goths, as he informs us, was not so much the destruction of their idolatry as it was the banishment of their warlike temper. They, however, made great progress in replacing their passion for martial campaigns with a settled, organized government and the upbuilding of their civilization.

From 250 to about 500, the Teutonic masses poured over the provinces of western Europe and formed ten new nations. Among these ten were the two branches of the Goths - the Visigoths, or western Goths, and the Ostrogoths, or eastern Goths. Other invading tribes were the Franks, the Burgundians, the Vandals, the Anglo-Saxons, the Alamanni, the Heruli, and the Suevi. These were destined to become powerful nations of western Europe. The invading hosts settled in the Roman Empire, forming such kingdoms as England, France, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, and Portugal. Three other kingdoms arose from the migrations, and if they had not been conquered, the Heruli might now be ruling over central and southern Italy, the Vandals over northern Africa, and the Ostrogoths in southern Europe.

For two centuries these questions hung in the balance: Would these new nations cling to their ancient Germanic paganism? Would they become converts to Celtic Christianity? Would they fall under the dominion of the church at Rome? It is a gripping story that reveals how they were converted, some at first to Gothic, but later all to Celtic, Christianity before they were subdued by hostile nations whose armies were urged on by the Papacy.

Because Ulfilas belonged to the church which had refused to accept the extreme speculations concerning the Trinity, there was a gulf between his converts and those who followed Rome. Brought up in captivity, he had not witnessed the stirring scenes of the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325). In that famous historic assembly the church at Rome and the emperor rejected the views of Arius, and condemnation was pronounced upon those who recoiled from accepting the council's decision. Whether the teachings of Arius were such as are usually represented to us or not, who can say? Philippus Limborch doubts that Arius himself ever held that Christ was created instead of being begotten. 5

Because of Constantine's favor, the party of the church at Rome was dominant. After Constantine's death, however, emperors for nearly a half century played loosely with the opponents of the Roman Church and often lifted the ban on the opposing groups. In fact, there were times when it looked as if the views of those who rejected the extreme Trinitarian speculations would become permanently dominant in the empire. Consequently when thousands of churches and church leaders of the opposition were stigmatized as Arians, it is not surprising to find Ulfilas standing for these beliefs.

Since the Goths had no written language, Ulfilas was compelled to invent an alphabet. He reduced Gothic sounds to writing. The first great piece of literature which the people of these vast nations, lying north of the empire's frontiers, looked upon was the Bible. It became the bond of union amongst the

Gothic peoples. It was the parent of Teutonic literature. It was the forerunner of a Luther, a Shakespeare, and a Goethe. But, as Massmann observes, there is no trace of what was called Arianism in the surviving remains of the Gothic translation of the New Testament. 6

Since his ancestors were from Asia Minor (the provinces where the apostle Peter had been especially instructed by God to plant the gospel), Ulfilas was undoubtedly influenced by the doctrines of the apostle to the Jews; and he rejected the liberal and unscriptural teachings which had flooded many western churches. He was a believer in the divine revelation of the Old Testament, as well as that of the New Testament. He impressed upon the Gothic people a simple, democratic Christianity. Like Patrick and Columba, he apparently kept the seventh day as the Sabbath. This may be seen in the following quotation concerning the great Theodoric, a subsequent king of the Goths (A.D. 454-526), taken from the historian Sidonius Apollinaris. Sidonius was not only a bishop of the church in France, but was also the son-in-law of the Roman emperor. He was in France when the great invasions of the Goths took place. Therefore, he was well informed on the practices of the Goths. He writes:

It is a fact that formerly those who dwelt in the east were accustomed as a church to sanctify the Sabbath in the same manner as the Lord's day, and to hold sacred assemblies; wherefore Asterius, bishop of Amasia in Pontus, in a homily on incompatibility called Sabbath and Sunday a beautiful span, and Gregory of Nyssa in a certain sermon calls these days brethren and therefore censures the luxury and the Sabbatarian pleasures; while on the other hand, the people of the west, contending for the Lord's day, have neglected the celebration of the Sabbath, as being peculiar to the Jews. Whence Tertullian in his Apology: 'We are only next to those who see in the Sabbath a day only for rest and relaxation.' It is, therefore, possible for the Goths to have thought, as pupils of the discipline of the Greeks, that they should sanctify the Sabbath after the manner of the Greeks. 7

From a scholar and traveler describing the Muscovite Russian Church (Christians still dwelling in the region where tribes formerly had been affected by the teachings of Ulfilas) we learn that after their conversion they "ever since continued of the Greeke Communion and Religion; ...reputing it unlawful to fast on Saturdaies." 8

This same author, describing the doctrine of the Greek Orthodox Church, says:

They admit Priests' Marriages.... That they reject the religious use of Massie, Images, or Statues, admitting yet Pictures or plaine Images in their Churches. That they solemnize Saturday (the old Sabbath) festively, and eat therein flesh, forbidding as unlawful, to fast any Saturday in the year except Easter Eve. 9

The Papacy for many centuries commanded fasting on Saturday and this created a dislike among the unthinking church members for the sacredness of the day. 10

Conversion of the Goths by Ulfilas

It would be impossible to obtain a correct understanding of the events which drove the church into the wilderness without realizing the large part in the drama which circled about the Goths. Tribe after tribe of the Teutons - the practically unknown peoples living north of the Danube - possessed the power of making crushing blows against settled states. Masses of humanity, capable of being mobilized into destructive invading armies, hung upon the confines of the Roman Empire. The revolution wrought by their migrations and decisive victories in battle will appear as we evaluate their place in history. To the

surprise of all, the Goths were won to the gospel in an astonishingly short time, not by the persuasion of Rome, but by Ulfilas. While the church at Rome was grasping after secular power, these churches were alive with missionary zeal.

Onward then came those mighty armies of the invading hosts. Giant men seated on war steeds preceded the covered wagons in which were women, children, and earthly possessions. Province after province fell before their powerful battle-axes. The Roman populace either perished or fled to mountains and dens. Finally, in 409, the invaders arrived before Rome. After conquering the city which for centuries had terrified the world, they retired. But they returned after several decades for the final conquest of Italy.

The Goths and the Vandals did not fight because of a bloodthirsty temperament, but because they were blocked by the Romans when driven westward by the wild masses from Scythia and Siberia. The historian Walter F. Adeney has pictured the spirit and methods of the Goths when they sacked Rome in 410:

In the first place, it was a great thing for Europe that when the Goths poured over Italy and even captured Rome they came as a Christian people, reverencing and sparing the churches, and abstaining from those barbarities that accompanied the invasion of Britain by the heathen Saxons. But, in the second place, many of these simple Gothic Christians learned to their surprise that they were heretics, and that only when their efforts toward fraternizing with their fellow Christians in the orthodox Church were angrily resented. 11

The following words from Thomas Hodgkin show how superior were these invading hosts to the corrupt condition of the state church in north-em Africa, when the Vandals who also refused Rome's state-prescribed doctrines seized the homeland of Tertullian and Cyprian:

Augustine had said: 'I came from my native town to Carthage, and everywhere around me roared the furnace of unholy love.... Houses of ill-fame swarming in each street and square, and haunted by men of the highest rank, and what should have been venerable age; chastity outside the ranks of the clergy a thing unknown and unbelieved, and by no means universal within that enclosure; the darker vices, the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah practiced, avowed, gloried in' - such is the picture which the Gaulish presbyter draws of the capital of Africa.

Into this city of sin marched the Vandal army, one might almost say, when one reads the history of their doings, the army of the Puritans. With all their cruelty and all their greed they kept themselves unspotted by the licentiousness of the splendid city. They banished the men who were earning their living by ministering to the vilest lusts. They rooted out prostitution with a wise yet not a cruel hand. In short, Carthage, under the rule of the Vandals, was a city transformed, barbarous but moral. 12

At this point it should be clearly stated that the Goths are not being presented as constituting the Church in the Wilderness. However, they certainly were not in sympathy with the church at Rome. They were a people in which truth was struggling to come to the surface. But, on the other hand, the religious power predicted in Daniel 8:12 was to cast down the truth to the ground, and so to practice and prosper.(Daniel 8:12.)

The 1260-Year Prophecy of the Little Horn

Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be the fourth kingdom upon earth, which shall be diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. And the ten horns out of this kingdom are ten kings that shall arise: and another shall rise after them; and he shall be diverse from the first, and he shall subdue three kings. And he shall speak great words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High, and think to change times and laws; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time. But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end."(Daniel 7:23-26.)

The chain of prophecy in Daniel 7 reveals by the means of animal symbols, the succession of world events from the time of the prophetic writer until the second coming of Christ. On the head of the fourth beast of Daniel's prophecy, which beast is often interpreted to be the fourth universal monarchy, the Roman Empire, are seen ten horns. Commentators correctly conclude that these are the ten Germanic kingdoms which invaded, broke up, and took possession of the western part of the Roman Empire, or the original territory of the fourth beast. The rise of the "little horn," its growth in power, its plucking up of three of the ten horns, and its stout words against God, accompanied by the 1260-year persecution of the saints, must now claim attention.

Clovis was the king of the Franks, one of the pagan tribes which had previously crossed the empire's frontiers into the province of Gaul. His father before him had worked devotedly with Rome's bishops. Clovis met and successfully overthrew the feeble resistance of the empire's army. His next formidable enemy was the pagan Alamanni, later to be called the Germans. 13 He had a long and bloody battle with them in which he successfully resisted their invasion. Previous to this, he had married Clotilda, daughter of the king of the Burgundians, and a devout Catholic.

Observing the power and influence of the Papacy, and anxious to avail himself of papal support, he professed conversion in 496, and his entire following united with him in adherence to Catholicism, three thousand of whom were baptized along with himself soon after his conversion. As he expected, the Catholics rallied around him as the only Catholic prince in the West. 14

The Teutonic kingdoms which had occupied other Roman provinces, as well as France, were either continuing in their idolatry or were converts to Christianity as taught by Ulfilas. They are usually catalogued as Arians. After his political conversion to Christianity as championed by the church at Rome, Clovis defeated the Burgundians, which people at this time were divided between paganism and Christianity. The desire to spread his new religion and to ruin Christian kingdoms which refused the new doctrines seemed to be the aim of his warlike temper. The barbarity and cruelty of his subsequent acts proved how much his conversion was political and not a surrender to truth in the heart. There is no question but that his new profession served the purpose of establishing and enlarging his kingdom, and for this reason he renounced idolatry for the Christianity of the church at Rome. 15

The climax of his rise to fame and power was attained when he reached out to take the rich and beautiful lands of southern France from the kingdom of the Visigoths. Step by step, supported by Rome and by the influence of the emperor of Constantinople, Clovis drove them back until the great and decisive battle of 507-508 was waged. It was decisive because neighboring pagan kingdoms that hated him were ready to rush in against him if he lost. Rome watched with anxious heart the outcome of this decisive battle, for she well knew that her hopes of expansion in this world were vain if her only prince in the West failed.

The emperor at Constantinople also followed with breathless attention the news of this war. The emperor, faced by powerful enemies on the east and north, saw little future for the type of Christianity he was championing if Clovis failed to give the Franks a permanent place under the sun by this final victory.

The army of the Visigoths was routed by the Franks in the encounter of 507. It was necessary for Clovis to destroy the sources of further supply. He struck while the iron was hot, and in 508 pursued the Visigoths to their southern strongholds and overcame them. Clovis was named consul by the emperor; 16 while by the church at Rome he was called the first Catholic Majesty and his successor "the Eldest Son of the Church." The "little horn" was now in process of uprooting other horns. How great was the significance on the course of the world's history of the culmination in 508 of the establishment of the first Catholic kingdom in the West, let witnesses testify. Says R. W. Church:

The Frank king threw his sword into the scale against the Arian cause, and became the champion and hope of the Catholic population all over Gaul.

The *invaders* had at length arrived, *who were to remain*. It was decided that *the Franks, and not the Goths*, were to direct the future destinies of Gaul and Germany, and that the *Catholic faith*, and not Arianism, was to be the religion of these great realms. 17

Again, from Dr. David J. Hill, former United States ambassador to Germany:

Up to the time of Clovis the invading hordes of the East had moved steadily westward.... Thenceforth that tide was to be turned backward, and conquest was to proceed in the opposite direction. The Franks alone, of all the barbarian races which had invaded the empire, were not wholly absorbed by it; but kept, as it were, an open channel of communication with the great Germanic background. It was the Franks who, turning their faces eastward, not only *checked further advances of the barbarians*, but...were to become the defenders of Christendom. 18

As Prof. George Adams writes:

This question Clovis settled, not long after the beginning of his career, by his conversion to Catholic Christianity.... In these three ways, therefore, the work of Clovis was of creative influence upon the future. He brought together the Roman and the German upon equal terms, each preserving the sources of his strength to form a new civilization. He founded a political power which was to unite nearly all the continent in itself, and to BRING THE PERIOD OF THE INVASIONS TO AN END." 19

Thus it was Clovis, king of the Franks, who in 508 put an end to the prospect that paganism might eventually be supreme.

He [Clovis] had on all occasions shown himself the heartless ruffian, the greedy conqueror, the bloodthirsty tyrant; but by his conversion he had led the way to the triumph of Catholicism; he had saved the Roman Church from the Scylla and Charybdis of heresy and paganism. 20

Through Clovis a new era began. We quote now from Lewis Sergeant:

But after all the changes, it was the Franks who constantly grew strong, who built up a law, a church, and an empire.... The baptism of Clovis, which implied the general conversion of the Franks to Christianity, set the crown on a century of striking successes for the western church. 21

Subjugation of the Goths by Emperor Justinian

Thirty years after the victory of 508 the Papacy was elevated to universal supremacy by Justinian. The stage was already set. The victory of Clovis over the Visigoths in 508 which broke the centuries of pagan dominion did not necessarily eradicate paganism scattered elsewhere. Thirty years later (A.D. 538) dominion passed to the Papacy, a theocracy which persecuted more severely than did paganism. It is generally recognized that a union of church and state is more intolerant than a political state.

Fired by the victory of Clovis, the ecclesiastical power of Rome was stirring everywhere. In northern Africa they were disturbing the peace of the Christian kingdom of the Vandals, and in Spain they were rising against the Visigoths. Everywhere, says Milman, the ecclesiastics were increasing their power as mediators, negotiators of treaties, or as agents in the submission or revolt of cities. 22

The Church Forced Into the Wilderness

Justinian determined to make the rule of the Papacy universal within his dominion. In 532 he issued his famous edict which laid the foundation for the persecutions of the church which maintained the apostolic faith during the 1260 years. The distinction between the important dates of 532, 533, and 538 should now be considered.

Archibald Bower says of the edict of Justinian:

By an edict which he issued to unite all men in one faith, whether Jews, Gentiles, or Christians, such as did not, in the term of three months, embrace and profess the Catholic faith, were declared infamous, and, as such, excluded from all employments both civil and military, rendered incapable of leaving anything by will, and their estates confiscated, whether real or personal. These were convincing arguments of the truth of the Catholic faith; but many, however, withstood them; and against such as did, the imperial edict was executed with the utmost rigor. Great numbers were driven from their habitations with their wives and children, stripped and naked. Others betook themselves to flight, carrying with them what they could conceal, for their support and maintenance; but they were plundered of the little they had, and many of them inhumanly massacred by the Catholic peasants, or the soldiery, who guarded the passes. 23

The emperor prescribed the faith of every man, and that faith consisted of the doctrines of Rome. There was no protest from the pope. The world dominion of paganism had come to an end; but a dominion more damaging to primitive Christianity, more blighting to the intellect, had taken its place. The edict of Justinian in 532 extended over the whole empire as far as it then stretched. When, however, northern Africa and Italy were conquered, this edict followed the imperial arms. The severe and ruinous application of the decree did not cease when the three months specified in it ceased. It set the pace for the 1260-year period brought to view by the prophet Daniel.

By the decree of 532 Justinian reduced all true and sincere believers to the direst condition. But by the decree of 533 he exalted the Papacy to the highest earthly position possible. This exaltation, however, was in decree only, until success in war put it into effect. It, therefore, at first could apply only to his own territory. On the other hand, both decrees applied in Europe when in 538 the Ostrogoths in Italy were crushed and more power was given to the Papacy.

Justinian wrote to the pope in 533: "We have made no delay in subjecting and uniting to Your Holiness all the priests of the whole East." In the same letter he also said: "We cannot suffer that anything

which relates to the state of the church, however manifest and unquestionable, should be moved, without the knowledge of Your Holiness, who are THE HEAD OF ALL THE HOLY CHURCHES." 24

When the news came of the success of his general in crushing the Vandals in Africa in 534, Justinian was elated. Then, as the historian Gibbon says: "Impatient to abolish the temporal and spiritual tyranny of the Vandals, he proceeded without delay to the full establishment of the Catholic Church." 25

An opening having presented itself to declare war on the Ostrogoths, Justinian dispatched his general, Belisarius, against them. After a series of victories, the general entered Rome with his army. The Ostrogoths came 150,000 strong to lay siege against Justinian's army, but they were outgeneraled. They could make no headway against the city; while behind them, the hostility of the people depressed them. "The whole nation of the Ostrogoths had been assembled for the attack," says Thomas Hodgkin, "and was almost consumed in the siege." "One year and nine days after the commencement of the siege," he further says, "an army so lately strong and triumphant, burnt their tents and recrossed the Milvian Bridge." "With heavy hearts the barbarians must have thought, as they turned them northwards, upon the many graves of gallant men which they were leaving on that fatal plain. Some of them must have suspected the melancholy truth that they had dug one grave, deeper and wider than all, the grave of the Gothic monarchy in Italy. 26

Because of the events of this year, 538, the Papacy had gained a temporal foothold. It could progressively claim independent sovereignty and so was more able to carry out its program to secure supreme rule. Making the papal hierarchy supreme in Italy would ultimately create a dual sovereignty there, and establish a precedent for the same methods among other nations. The ruin of the Ostrogothic power blocked the way for a united Italy to put a king of its own on the throne.

The historian Milman, commenting upon the destruction of the Ostrogoths, writes:

The conquest of Italy by the Greeks was, to a great extent at least, the work of the Catholic clergy.... The overthrow of the Gothic kingdom was to Italy an unmitigated evil.... In their overthrow began the fatal policy of the Roman See, fatal at least to Italy,...which never would permit a powerful native kingdom to unite Italy, or a very large part of it, under one dominion. Whatever it may have been to Christendom, the Papacy has been the eternal, implacable foe of Italian independence and Italian unity. 27

It makes little difference whether the self-appointed successor of Peter rules over ten square miles or ten million square miles. If he rules, he is as verily a king as any other sovereign. Today, he is the emperor of the Vatican empire. He appoints his ambassadors, coins his money, has his own postal service. Yet why should he be made a king any more than the head of any of the Protestant churches? Such a kingship requires a union of church and state. Such a kingdom was especially condemned by Jesus.

Justinian declared the pope to be "THE HEAD OF ALL THE HOLY CHURCHES." Though the popes forgot that this title was given by fallible man, not by God, they have never forgotten to claim that power. The bitter injustice done to the Italian people by Justinian's enthronement of the Papacy in their midst, which created a sovereignty within a sovereignty, may be seen in the character of the emperor. What kind of man was Justinian? Gibbon declares:

The reign of Justinian was a uniform yet various scene of persecution; and he appears to have surpassed his indolent predecessors, both in the contrivance of his laws and the rigor of their execution. The insufficient term of three months was assigned for the conversion or exile of all heretics; and if he still connived at their precarious stay, they were deprived, under his iron yoke, not only of the benefits of society, but of the common birthright of men and Christians. 28

The Papacy has always held that her tradition is of equal authority with the Scriptures. Having "eyes like the eyes of man,"(Daniel 7:8.) the Papacy cried out, More power, more power. She immediately turned her wrath upon the refugees in Italy who had fled out of the East from the decree of Justinian in order to find security under the tolerant rule of the Ostrogothic king Theodoric.

These joined the Waldenses who were convinced that the Papacy was the "little horn" of Daniel, and the "man of sin" of Paul's writings.²⁹ The Church of Rome accepted the persecuting policy of Justinian, even as she had accepted the exalted title he bestowed upon her. Then to the true church were given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly from the "great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."(Matthew 24:21.) The Dark Ages began. Implacable and unrelenting persecution was the resort of the church and state system. Wielding a power greater than that ever exercised by the caesars, Romanism pursued the church farther and farther into the wilderness. Nevertheless, affliction and trials caused the persecuted church to live on, shining brighter and brighter until, at the hand of God's providence, her persecutor received a "deadly wound" when the 1260 years ended. 30

Ulfilas passed on. The church of the emperors, which he had ignored and whose teachings he refused to impart to the hordes of the north, later destroyed the sovereignty of those nations who professed his faith. They were conquered neither by New Testament teaching nor by missionary effort, but by the sword. Though independent role was taken away from the Goths, the Gothic people lived on. They were in subjection, but they evinced no great love for the mysterious articles of faith taught by the lash of the whip. Deprived of martial weapons, they became an easy prey to the rapidly advancing Franks. Nevertheless, one can follow the stirring movements among their descendants as they listened to men mighty in the prophecies and faith of Jesus. The days dawned when others came in the spirit and power of Ulfilas. Such contributed their part when the hour came to have the Bible once more exalted as the center of all Christian life and belief. 31