

Billy Graham's



"My Answer"

DEAR DR. GRAHAM: I have heard my pastor talk about "original sin," but I'm not sure I understand what he means. Does the Bible talk about this?--H.N.

DEAR H.N.: Although the exact words ("original sin") are not found in the Bible, it is a term theologians have used to describe a thoroughly Biblical teaching--one that is found, in fact, throughout the Bible. Basically, what your pastor means is this: The Bible declares that every individual on this earth is a sinner. "There is no one righteous, not even one...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:10, 23). But it teaches that we are not just sinners because we sin--we sin because we are sinners! Think about that a moment. We sin because there is within us an inclination or tendency toward sin. Our basic nature is warped and twisted, and we are born with the tendency to sin. The book of Genesis declares about man, "every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood" (Genesis 8:21). The Psalmist states, "Surely I have been a sinner from birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Psalm 51:5). Man, in other

words, is born with the tendency to sin--it is part of his original nature. Just as a child may be born with a crippling disease, so we are all born with a spiritual disease which cripples us--the disease of sin.

But the good news of the Gospel is that we do not have to remain enslaved by sin, nor do we have to stay under the judgment God has pronounced on sin. We cannot free ourselves from our sin, nor can we forgive ourselves. Only God can do this--but he does, in his Son Jesus Christ. Christ came primarily to deal with sin and to make forgiveness and new life possible. "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness. But you know that he appeared, so that he might take away our sins" (1 John 3: 4-5).

Have you committed your life to Jesus Christ? He alone can take away our sins, and he will as we turn to him in repentance and faith.

History of Hymns

by William J. Reynolds

*Wake, awake, for night is flying,
The watchmen on the
nights are crying,
Awake, Jerusalem, at last.*

This Advent hymn was written in the winter of 1597, by Philip Nicolai, the Lutheran pastor in the Westphalia town of Unna.

Bubonic plague had struck the town of Unna in the summer of 1597, and had claimed 1400 lives in six months. Nicolai's parsonage overlooked the churchyard, where sometimes there were as many as 30 funerals in one day. He faithfully ministered to his flock and comforted them in their sorrow.

During these days, Nicolai kept a record of his daily meditations. This he published in 1599, with the unusual title "Mirror of Joys."

"Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying" was one of two hymns he included in this book. As one reads these stanzas against the background of the extra-ordinary circumstances in which they were written, one senses the radiant faith of this Lutheran pastor.

The hymn is richly embroidered with biblical references. With the promises of God, Nicolai comforted his bereaved flock as they bore the bodies of loved ones and neighbors to the churchyard. For the believers there is the promise of heaven in death, and the reality of being in the presence of Christ, the Bridegroom.

Nicolai wrote the music we sing for the hymn and published both words and music in his "Mirror of Joys." The magnificent tune has long since been referred to as the "King of the Chorales."

Many English translations of the German hymn have been made, but the most widely used and the most enduring was done by Catherine Winkworth, and published in London in 1858. It is found in most American hymnals.

Advent, in anticipation of Christmas, remembers the first coming of Christ and claims the hope of his second coming. Like the wise ones in Jesus' parable of the ten virgins, to which Nicolai refers, we keep our lamps burning bright and our lives reflecting this hope.

NEXT WEEK'S HYMN: "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus"

Dr. William J. Reynolds is on the faculty of the school of Music at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth. He is immediate past president of the Hymn Society of America and was formerly secretary of the Church Music Department of the Southern Baptist Sunday school board. A lecturer, musician and composer, he was written several books on hymns and was general editor of Baptist Hymnal.

Religion North Of The Border

PRINCETON, N.J.--A recent report from the Gallup-affiliated Canadian Institute of Public Opinion shows that 37% of Canadians attended church during the first week of May. While the current figure represents little change in church attendance during the late 1970s, it is considerably down from the 55% level found in 1965.

Churchgoing has remained fairly stable over the last few years among both Roman Catholics and Protestants. In the latest survey 51% of Catholics attended in the test week compared to 29% among Protestants.

The decline in churchgoing since 1965 has been primarily a Catholic phenomenon. In 1965, 83% of Canadian Catholics attended in a test week, while 32% of Protestants did so.

Churchgoing In United States

The national rate of attendance in the U.S. is similar, with 40% of adults attending church or synagogue in a typical week. Furthermore, the rate of attendance among U.S. Catholics closely parallels the rate among Canadian Catholics, with 53% in the U.S. attending on the average.

Churchgoing among U.S. Protestants however, is considerably higher than it is among their Canadian counterparts--39% compared to 29%.

As in Canada, churchgoing in the U.S. today is lower than in the mid-1960s, with the decline again almost entirely the result of a decline in attendance among Catholics. The dimension of the decline in churchgoing among Catholics has been slightly greater for Canada (down approximately 30 points over this 15-year period) than for the U.S. (down approximately 20 points).

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