

security will be laid bare as a delusion. Then - when they have heard the old, reliable Law - then they will rejoice to hear the truth of the Gospel. Its true freedom, its true liberation from death and the fear of death, the liberty it brings from all the schemes and inventions of men, the joy it brings with the certainty of life everlasting - all these can be theirs and your family's and your friends' and your neighbors' right now.

The best time to say all these things to all these people, to preach the gospel to every creature, was fifty years ago when we saw it begin slipping from their minds and cooling in their hearts. We should've acted faster back then. But the second-best time to proclaim these truths is right now.

They are surely hungry. They aren't eating right. They're stuffing everything down that will only make them worse off than they were before. Give them the Bread that endures. Give them the knowledge of the fear of God and of the love of God in Christ Jesus. Surely there is great hunger and great despair and great sadness. But the LORD says, "I will feed them" (Ezekiel 34:13,14).

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AMERICA'S HUNGER FOR THE PURE GOSPEL

BY REV. DR. ADAM C. KOONTZ

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THE KIND OF HUNGER that announces itself loudly when you skipped a meal or two or the pains when you've gone far too long without - of that kind of painful, loud, obvious hunger for spiritual things, for all joy and peace in believing, we see little in modern America. Church doors that were once beaten down by the crowds milling in to attend services stand on rusty hinges. Classrooms and "education wings" erected in times with more children generally and more children in church specifically are spotless in their emptiness.

Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. Our family and friends and coworkers may be alive in body, but in spirit they perish. They are starving to death. The famine we now endure is a famine not of bread nor of water nor of processed foods but of hearing the word of the LORD. The days are coming and are now here when such a famine is widespread.

Contrary to the predictions of many, especially in the twentieth century, the shrinkage of Christianity as a force in people's lives has not meant their "secularization," their complete satisfaction with going out to eat, youth sports, and drugs legal and illegal, the pleasures offered along

with Netflix every night and weekend to keep the masses occupied with something other than God. It has not worked out well.

In one direction, Americans have not become less interested in “spiritual” things, however uninterested they have become in the Bible and “organized” religion. The more outré or odd, the more ground that’s been gained since the 1960s. Books on healing crystals, astrology, and Wicca crowd public library bookshelves that may have once had a complete set of Bible commentaries. “Spiritual” practices and religious predilections can change overnight with the help of a search engine. The girl who was confirmed in your Lutheran congregation five years ago could be a Buddhist or a Wiccan by now, depending on what she has looked up.

But she is likeliest to be very little at all, spiritually speaking. In the other direction from the growth of strange spiritual or religious beliefs and practices distant from historic Christianity, we have fled into near-constant immersion in consumer experiences that always elude our ability to find contentment. Games of every description and on every imaginable platform, sports news that can fuel our betting, instantly available lewdness - all these are ours anywhere all of the time. You could think of any other number of substances, foods, toys, clothes, or anything else a person might buy, subscribe to, or rent, but you could not think of how any of this has made our families stronger, our lives more purposeful and meaningful, or our hearts less terrified of insignificance today and death tomorrow.

The hunger and restlessness of hearts that are not at rest in Christ is of course everywhere. The hunger pains are numbed by the possibility that we could find something else that would bring us happiness if we had a little more money or square footage on our lot or a better job.

In a famine it is not necessary that we become gourmet chefs. People are starving to death. They need a square meal, not caviar. Their flight into every strange spiritual practice and religiopolitical superstition is evidence of starvation. Their desire to numb their lives through entertainment, gluttony, and distraction is evidence of starvation.

Feed them with the Bread of Life. Give them old, reliable words, the very Word of God, for their hearts to fasten on. We have always said “Law and Gospel” are necessary for every person to hear, but we have



sometimes said it so much that it sounded like “lawngospel” when we said it aloud and seemed like some kind of cliché when we rehearsed its necessity to each other. It never was so garbled nor so clichéd, but we perhaps failed to grasp what the stakes were: if we do not preach God’s truth about what our lives should be and what His life, death, and resurrection for us are, we will surely starve to death.

If our family, friends, and neighbors (not the hypothetical ones, the ones across the street from our churches and our homes) don’t hear what God has said about who they are (boys and girls, no third option, for example) and what He would have them be (honest, brave, loving their families, for example), how will they ever know that they have a Father who has some kind of standard for life, that their lives are not collections of random events strung together until death stops it all? In 2020 you saw how many people just wanted someone else to tell them what to do. Why not have them listen to the only true God tell them the truth of what to do and to leave undone instead of the traditions of men created to enslave them?

If they hear His truth about their lives, then their hearts will be shaken and all the security they found in false gods and wasted time and disgusting things they look back on even now with shame - all that