

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN THESE TIMES

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Chester Tulga's study tracing the doctrine of the church from its Old Testament origins through the founding of the New Testament community at Pentecost.

9 Chapters

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000 - Introduction

INTRODUCTION A true New Testament witness will always deny “Apostolic succession” of individuals and will always affirm “Apostolic succession” of the institution of the local Church. JESUS said, “Upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

Ecumenicity in ecclesiology and liberalism in theology are today walking hand in hand producing One Big Universal Church and preaching “another gospel” by which its members for salvation are learning lessons from the life of JESUS, instead of salvation by faith from the death of JESUS!

If the present-day New Testament Christians are descendants from the “ana-baptists” of the middle ages as history indicates, let us remember that it was the doctrine of “believers’ baptism” that distinguished the “ana-baptist” from the pedo-baptist”; and it was the doctrine of “scriptural immersion” that distinguished the New Testament witness from other species of “ana-baptists”; and it was the doctrine of absolute “religious liberty” for the individual preached and taught by the independent and “sovereign local Church” that infuriated the Roman Catholic Church into such bitter and cruel persecution of these New Testament Christians. The Roman Catholic Visitor in 1946 was explaining how the “Protestant Reformation” happened: This official organ of Rome declared that the Reformation was not religious in its nature; it happened at a time when the Roman Catholic Church was weak politically! All of the leading Reformers, who so heroically freed the Church from the Roman Catholic Church and the Pope, fastened a State Church upon the people wherever they went, and the true New Testament sovereign local Church that stood for absolute religious liberty was persecuted by these State Churches of the reformers: This was true of - Luther, who fastened a State Church upon Germany.

- Zwingli, who fastened a State Church upon Switzerland.

- John Knox, who fastened a State Church upon Scotland.

- Henry VIII, who fastened a State Church upon England.

These all became persecutors like Rome before them! John Calvin’s Consistory, a bold-faced inquisition, in Vienna condemned Michael Servetus as a heretic to be burned at the stake June 17, 1553; Servetus fled, was apprehended in Geneva, and was burned at the stake October 27, 1553. Liberalism in all of its nature is today more political than it is religious, and by the strain and stress of “pressure tactics,” directly and indirectly, by its ecclesiastical power, is striving to force its unbiblical principles especially upon those persuasions standing staunchly and separately in sovereign local Churches!

We know of no chapter and verse in the Bible to justify an “associate member” or “probationary member” of the body of Christ, and the local earthly Church is the pattern of that heavenly body.

J. D. Murphy’s definition for a local New Testament Church cannot be shortened: “You have believers, baptized, joined, and hence, ‘Church.’” THE BIBLE DENIES APOSTOLIC

SUCCESSION

1. Apostles should have seen JESUS CHRIST and been eye and ear witnesses of what they testified to in the world concerning Him.

“And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning” (John 15:27)
“Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us” (Acts 1:21-22) “Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?” (1 Corinthians 9:1) “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life” (1 John 1:1) 2. Apostles were chosen and appointed to their offices by CHRIST Himself, and with the exception of Matthias, who was appointed by lot, there were no exceptions “And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor” (Luke 6:13-16).

“But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel... And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth” (Acts 9:15; Acts 22:14).

3. Apostles had the gift of plenary inspiration “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves... For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matthew 10:16, Matthew 10:20).

“If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14:15-18).

“For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:5-8).

“But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ..

. “ (Galatians 1:11-12; cf 1 Corinthians 2:4-16).

4. Apostles had the gift of tongues and the power to work diverse sorts of miracles. These were their credentials cf. Acts 3:1-26; Hebrews 2:4). From these Bible qualifications which in turn becomes premises, it is obviously impossible that the apostles could have successors in office.

ECUMENICITY DISSOLVES THE NEW TESTAMENT LOCAL CHURCH

SUCCESSION

1. The National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America is becoming the voice of GOD to many denominations (Constituting Convention, Cleveland, 10:59 a.m, November 29, 1950).
2. The voice of the denomination is becoming the voice of GOD to many pastors and local Churches.
3. The voice of their pastor and their local Church is becoming the voice of GOD to many Church members.
4. The voice of the Church members and professing Christians is becoming the voice of GOD to the unregenerate and godless world, who themselves have no knowledge or Bible background of Christian things.
5. Perhaps the paramount danger in all of this is a point of similarity between the Liberal Protestant Christianity and the Roman Catholic Church: Neither of these accept the Bible as a final authority for all matters of Christian faith and practice! Both are more political than religious!

Because of their age-long belief in Apostolic Succession, the Roman Catholic Church feels that they have authority in themselves to make changes they wish in Church Government or Church Doctrine!

Because Liberal Protestantism does not believe in “the faith once for all delivered to the saints,” they feel that the reinterpretation of this faith should be made by each successive generation of Liberals for each successive generation of Christians.

- If Miracles insult Reason, leave them out or interpret them away.
- If Regeneration insults Education, leave it out or interpret it away.
- If Creation insults Evolution, leave it out or interpret it away.

Recently a leading Liberal in Baptist circles has written a book Interpreters Needed! A better book would be “Declarers Needed!”

CONDITIONS AND COMPULSIONS FOR LOCAL CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

1. All who would become members of the local New Testament Church must be renewed or begotten by the Holy Spirit through the Word of Truth “Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

“Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Peter 1:23).

“For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15).

“Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18).

2. They must also believe on the name of the Lord JESUS CHRIST as the Way, the Truth, the Resurrection, and the Life “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

“But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

“And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).

“And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).

3. They must love CHRIST more than they love even their own lives and their most dear and cherished earthly relations “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26-27).

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

4. They must repent of their sins “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38) “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

5. They must turn from Satan to God and become humble and meek as little children.

“And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 18:3).

“Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

6. They must call on the name of the Lord in humble and earnest prayer and supplication.

“And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

“For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13).

7. They must confess CHRIST as the Son of GOD and Saviour of sinners “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10).

“Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Timothy 6:12).

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession” (Hebrews 4:14).⁸ They must be baptized by the authority of CHRIST in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the HOLY SPIRIT. WHEN WE LOSE OUR FREEDOM

Chief Justice, John Marshall of the Supreme Court said at the age of 75, “The Judicial Department comes home in its effects to every man’s fireside. It passes on his property, his reputation, his all. Is it not to the last degree important that he should be rendered perfectly and completely independent, with nothing to influence or control him but God and his conscience?” In this great country of separation of Church and state we enjoy dual liberties: political and moral. Our political liberties are based on our democracy, but our moral liberties are based on the declaration “That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...” We will lose these two freedoms when we lose our sovereign local Churches, that under God are, “The pillar and ground of the Truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). In Hitler’s day some thirty thousand state Churches, tax supported were the tools of and supported by the German government. About the time that Hitler’s government took over the Churches of Germany, Albert Einstein made the following statement, “Being a lover of freedom when the revolution came in Germany, - I looked to the universities to defend it, knowing that they had always boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth; but, no, the universities were immediately silenced.

- I looked to the great editors of the newspapers whose flaming editorials in days gone by had proclaimed their love for freedom; but they like the universities, were silenced in a few short weeks.

- I looked to the individual writers, who, as literary guides of Germany, had written much and often concerning the place of freedom in modern life; but they too were mute.

“Only the Church stood squarely across the path of Hitler’s campaign for suppressing truth. I never had any great interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom. I am forced to confess that what I once despised, I now praise unreservedly,” Our author, Dr. C. E. Tulga, generously and kindly dedicated a previous volume, The Independence of the Local Church to me and this great Fourth Baptist Church, which I have been privileged to serve as pastor for so many years. By a like kindness I am now writing an Introduction to The Local Church of the New Testament. Our author has with painstaking care in this volume given us the historical, biblical pattern and purposes of the God-ordained “pillar and ground of the truth,” the Local Church. If our freedoms are lost in this great nominally Christian nation, it will be because as enslaved citizens we can look back to the losing of the pattern and purposes of the local New Testament Church herein described.

CONCLUSIONThe New Testament Local Churches that have continued since the days of the apostles are easily identified in four different ways, 1. These local Churches stood for three distinct Bible truths. a. The Bible alone was accepted for faith and practice. b. The priesthood of believers made man accountable to God alone. c. Every regenerate Christian was allowed to interpret the Bible for himself.

2. These Churches stood for three distinct principles and beliefs. a. Autonomy and democratic government of the local Church. b. A regenerated membership responsible for the local Church. c. The two ordinances of the local Church were inside and inviolate.

3. These local Churches had three distinguishable connections. a. With the history of the New Testament Churches from the beginning. b. In any given age these local Churches had the closest connection with the true New Testament Churches of all ages. c. These New Testament Churches sustained the closest connections with the New Testament Gospel: repentance, faith, confession, obedience.

4. These local Churches in all ages had three distinguishable characteristics. a. Their accomplishments have been the most astonishing. b. Their persecutions have been the most severe. c. Their contributions to both Christianity and the governments of the world have been the most fruitful.

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01 - The Old Testament Background of the Church

Chapter 1 THE OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND OF THE CHURCH “If we are to understand the nature of the Church we must begin with the Old Testament,”

Clarence T. Craig (Man’s Disorder and GOD’s Design, Amsterdam Report, p. 32) “The rootage of Christianity in Hebrew history is deep, and undoubtedly a continuing purpose of GOD runs through both,” W. E. Garrison (A Protestant Manifesto, p. 95) “Since the time of Marcion, in the second century, until the present, Christians have to a large degree preferred to remain aloof from Judaism and assert that the Christian Church is original and independent of previous influences.” J. R. Nelson (The Realm of Redemption, pp. 3, 4).

“Professor Dodd (The Bible Today, p. 70) notes how the New Testament writers take up the ideal attributes of Israel and apply them to the Church. In Galatians, the Church is the ‘Israel of God’ (Galatians 6:16) In I Peter, it is ‘the people of God’ (1 Peter 2:9-10), whose members are a kingdom of priests (Revelation 1:6). To Paul, Isaiah’s righteous remnant (Romans 9:27), Jeremiah’s people of the new covenant (2 Corinthians 3:5-6), Daniel’s saints of the Most High (1 Corinthians 1:2). This is not enthusiastic rhetoric. It is a deliberate reapplication of prophetic language. It amounts to an assertion that the people of GOD have now passed through its supreme crisis, and reached its complete and final form.”

“The first Christian believers, as their words and actions in the accounts of Acts decisively portray, were thoroughly Jewish in thought and emotion. The religion and history they have received, to whatever degree of knowledge, were those of the chosen Israel. Therefore, they could not have known at the outset that their new faith in the risen CHRIST would eventually necessitate a divorce from the religion of their fathers, a break which none of them really desired.” J. Robert Nelson (The Realm of Redemption, p. 9).

“While it is true that the Church, in the strict sense of the word, and as a corporate institute was not founded while the Lord was on earth, in another sense He was laying the foundations during the whole of His ministry.” W. B. Pope (Compendium of Christian Theology, 3:262) 1. The Church was formed of the remnant of Israel. In considering the Old Testament background of the Church and the early Christian Jews, we must consider the Old Testament doctrine of the remnant which Paul carried over into the realm of grace. “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:5). The doctrine of the remnant is set forth in Amos, Micah, Malachi and especially in Isaiah. The remnant is the Father’s “little flock” in Israel, as the remnant was JESUS’ “little flock” (Luke 12:32). The little flock of JESUS is the saved remnant, those who were looking for the MESSIAH, and formed the nucleus of the new community which would be constituted on the Day of Pentecost. It is clear from the New Testament that the early Christians considered themselves the believing remnant in fleshly Israel, the real Jews (Romans 2:28-29). While JESUS did not directly connect the remnant of Israel with the Church He promised to build, the Apostles undoubtedly did (Galatians and Romans).

2. The Church was composed of the new people of GOD, in which there are no distinctions of race and nationality.

Throughout the Old Testament there is the concept of a people whom GOD has chosen to be His own in a peculiar sense. The Hebrews traced this election to the covenant which GOD made with Abraham, a covenant which included his descendents (Genesis 15:18; Genesis 17:7-8). They were to be a holy nation, a religious community faithful to the one true GOD, Jehovah. They were redeemed out of Egypt by the blood of the lamb and the outstretched arm of GOD. They were the people of GOD. The New Testament clearly teaches that the Church is the new people of GOD (Acts 15:14; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9). It is significant that Jesus, in gathering the nucleus of His Church, chose twelve men to be the patriarchs of the new people of GOD. In Romans 11:1-36 we see that GOD has not cast off His ancient people, Israel, but He has taken unto Himself a new people, redeemed by the blood of His Son and kept by His power. The background of the Church as the people of GOD, is the ancient people of GOD, and the Church has much to learn from their history.

3. The Church is a new fellowship, not based upon a common blood, but upon a common love for JESUS CHRIST.

"If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27; Matthew 10:37, 38). Here JESUS announces Himself as the center of a new allegiance which would transcend all human loyalties of kindred and home, an allegiance that would upset old traditions and create new patterns of human and religious fellowship. This new allegiance was radical, transforming, revolutionary, and would in time create a new fellowship around it. The ancient people, Israel, lost their spiritual pre-eminence. John the Baptist said to the Jews, "God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matthew 3:9). Paul said, "For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly... but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly" (Romans 2:28-29). The spiritual standards of the new fellowship became the criteria by which the ancient people were judged, putting them under the Messianic judgment. So even before the Church was formed, we see the outline of the spiritual ascendancy of the new people of GOD, to the disparagement of Israel.

4. The Church, the new fellowship is to be motivated by a more radical ethic than the law, the inward ethic of the heart. This inward ethic was prophesied by Jeremiah: "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; after those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they will be my people" (Jeremiah 31:31-33). The early Christians believed JESUS to be the mediator of this new covenant (Hebrews 12:24).

JESUS gathered together the believing remnant as a nucleus for His Church, with twelve disciples to lead it. What kind of lives were they to live? By what rules were they to live? In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord made it plain that He expected His men to live beyond the humanly possible, thus requiring divine assistance which was promised through the HOLY SPIRIT. The disciple must

live beyond the law, he must not only do no murder, he must not hate.

He must not only refrain from adultery, he must be free from lust in his heart. JESUS intended to build a holy Church, composed of holy people, whose lives would be holy. The ethic of this new fellowship would go far beyond the ethical demands of the law; reaching into the hidden springs of life and demanding truth and holiness in the inward parts.

5. These people who were to form the new Church were given two ordinances and the charter and commission of the Church. The ordinance of baptism, practiced by John the Baptist and later by the apostles, was given by example and precept before the Church was formed (Matthew 28:18-20). The institution of the Lord's supper had its beginning in the solemn meal of JESUS and His disciples (Matthew 26:26-29) before the Church was formed. The charter and commission of the Church, defining its power and authority, its world-wide field, its mission and its enduring assurance of divine aid, was given before the Church was formed (Matthew 28:18-20).

W. B. Pope (A Compendium of Christian Theology, 3:262) sums up this pre-Pentecostal period, "While it is true that the Church in the strict sense of the word, and as a corporate institute, was not founded while the Lord was upon earth, in another sense He was laying its foundation during the whole of His ministry.

"He left a large body of instruction concerning it which waited only for the Day of Pentecost to disclose its fulness of meaning. The germs and principles of all that is to follow in this branch of theology are to be found in the Gospels: indeed, we may be more bold, and say that nothing on this subject, or any other subject, can go beyond the meaning of the Lord's own words. He spoke of the Comforter as the future Divine Presence in the congregation; but His office was only to glorify, expound and expand the sayings of the Redeemer Himself. We shall find that this holds true in a very remarkable degree concerning the doctrine of the new Church or kingdom. A large part of the Saviour's teachings in the four Gospels treats of its nature, of the methods of its spread, of the character of its subjects, of its relations to the world, and of the principles of His own government in it."

~ end of chapter 1 ~

02 - The Church Described

Chapter 2 THE CHURCH DESCRIBED

“The visible Church is the Church in so far as it enshrines the invisible. Hence the ground of its unity is not to be found in its maintenance of a common order of ministry or profession of a common form of creed, but in its being the locus of that faith-relationship to GOD which constitutes its invisible essence. References to the Church universal include all Christian bodies of which this is true, and exclude those of which it is not.” Leonard Hodgson (The Nature of the Church, Edited by R. N. Flew, p. 289) “The Church... the whole number of spiritual regenerate believers, constituting ‘the body of Christ’ in this world, expounded particularly in Ephesians. This Church, for Baptists, is not, and cannot be, ecclesiastically organized; and it has no local seat nor any administrative human head or headship.” W. O. Carver (The Nature of The Church, Edited by R. N. Flew, p. 289) The nature of the Church is not primarily defined by a particular name, a particular creed, a form of organization, a doctrine of ordination or any view of ecclesiastical authority. This does not mean that these things are unimportant, but it does mean that in themselves, they may or may not define a true Church. The nature of the Church is set forth in the Scriptures under various figures.

1. The Church is a building. This does not refer to the edifice in which the congregation meets, for the apostolic Churches had no edifices to which the name of Church was attached. The Church is regarded as a structure and several aspects of truth are set forth under this figure.

CHRIST used this figure and said, “Upon this rock I will build my Church” (Matthew 16:18).

Paul uses this figure a number of times. “Ye are God’s building” (1 Corinthians 3:9). In Ephesians 2:20-22 we find this description of the Church: “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an habitation of God through the Spirit.”

Peter makes use of the same figure, saying, “Ye also, as lively stones, built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). The Church is a spiritual temple in which all believers are priests unto GOD, and they are to offer spiritual sacrifices to GOD. The apostles indicate that JESUS CHRIST, as the Foundation and Corner Stone, is essential to the structure of the building and any successful attempt to disprove His deity, destroy His integrity or question His teachings would fatally impair the soundness of the structure. This has happened many times in Christendom, producing false Churches. The stones of the building are individual Christians, each in his place and each contributing to the strength and the beauty of the structure. These stones are not to consider themselves autonomous, or “Church tramps” but they are to be part of the structure, the living temple, members of a “true” Church of CHRIST. The Church building in the New Testament is built of believers, not bricks.

2. The Church is a body - the body of CHRIST.

“And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the Church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Ephesians 1:22-23).

“And he is the head of the body, the Church” (Colossians 1:18). “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Romans 12:4-5). “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). There are a number of distinctive truths here which give us a full picture of what is involved in the phrase, “body of Christ.” (a) CHRIST is the Head of the Body, the Church. “The head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

“Christ is the head of the Church” (Ephesians 5:23). CHRIST is called the Head of the body He is the very center of its organic life and growth. The whole concept of the Church, of its life and ministry, membership and destiny, is linked to the Person of Christ, without whom there is no Church. The final authority over any Church is JESUS CHRIST, and all authorities which conflict with this authority must be rejected. This means that no human being, or organization of human beings, can become the head and authority over a Church of CHRIST. What a sweeping judgment upon the conflicting loyalties, the rival leaders and the apostasies of Christendom! (b) The HOLY SPIRIT is the life of the body, proceeding from both the Father and the Son. W.

H. Griffith-Thomas says, “There are at least twelve references to His Divine grace and work in relation to the body of Christ. From the moment of conversion He is everything to the individual Christian and to the whole Church.

It is the Spirit who seals the believer as belonging to CHRIST (Ephesians 1:13; Ephesians 4:30). By the Spirit we are, - introduced to the Father(Ephesians 2:18).

- We are indwelt by the Spirit(Ephesians 2:22).

- We are taught by the Spirit (Ephesians 3:5).

- The Spirit is the secret of inward strength (Ephesians 3:16), - of outward unity (Ephesians 4:3), - of inward sensitiveness (Ephesians 4:30),- and of spiritual fullness (Ephesians 5:18). The Word of GOD is described as ‘the sword of the Spirit’ (Ephesians 6:17, and prayer is to be offered ‘in the Spirit’ (Ephesians 6:18).

Thus, in every way, whether we think of the individual or the community, the Spirit of GOD actuates all.” (The Spirit of GOD, pp. 174,175) The Church without the HOLY SPIRIT, is a body without life. A religious body, apart from the HOLY SPIRIT, is not a Church. A Church which has disobeyed the Word of GOD, grieved the Spirit of GOD, and questioned the deity of the Son of GOD is a false Church undwelt by the Spirit of GOD. (c) The body of CHRIST is a unified diversity (1 Corinthians 12:12, 1 Corinthians 12:27; Romans 12:5). A body has many members and these have different functions. Yet it needs them all if it is to be truly a body. A body is a whole which needs all its differing parts. Unless there is unity in this diversity, there is no co-ordination and all is confusion and schism. In the New Testament we find a wide variety of persons, gifts, functions, but one Head, one faith.

Here is the integration produced by the Spirit of GOD, not the religious synthesis produced by the blending of differences on a minimal doctrinal basis such as the present ecumenical movements and many of the great denominations. In the body of CHRIST there is diversity, but it is a unified

diversity controlled and dominated by the Spirit of GOD under the Lordship of CHRIST.

3. The Church is a bride. This concept of the Church has a strong Old Testament background.

- Hosea represents GOD as saying to his people Israel: "And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD" (Hosea 2:19-20).

- Isaiah says, "For thy Maker is thine husband: the LORD of hosts is his name" (Isaiah 54:5).

- Jeremiah 3:14 says, "Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you."

Modern theologians have little to say about the Church, the bride of Christ, in spite of the rich biblical teachings concerning the mystical relationship between the Lord and His people, revealed in both the Old and New Testaments. Rejecting the marriage of the Lamb to His bride at His second coming, they have little use for the figure of speech so rich in spiritual significance, and so rebuking to the modern Church guilty of spiritual adultery with other lovers. The classical passage in the New Testament is found in, Ephesians 5:25-32 : "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies.

He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hateth his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church: for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church." This union is not only a mystical union, it is a holy union, requiring from the Church a character corresponding to this holy relationship. Here is required the highest fidelity to Christ, the deepest loyalty, the most transcendent love, so unlike the Churches today. The spiritual marriage between CHRIST and His Church will be consummated when He comes in glory and gathers His true people to Himself. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready... And he said unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:7, Revelation 19:9).

All these metaphors imply the spiritual unity of the Church, but that of the temple suggests its dignity and sanctity, that of the body its co-operation, that of the bride its purity.

Four Characteristics of the Church 1. The Church is one. "There is one body, and one spirit" (Ephesians 4:4). "We, being many, are one body in Christ" (Romans 12:5). The unity of the Church has but one ground, that of a common union with Christ; and every reference to it makes this prominent. In John 17:21 JESUS makes this clear: "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." This is spiritual oneness, more profound and more spiritual than external organization can effect.

External oneness is never alluded to beyond an individual congregation. The constant tone of apostolic doctrine points to the maintenance of a spiritual unity rather than organizational unity.

Paul warns of divisions within the local congregation (1 Corinthians 3:1-23). The principles upheld in the case of local congregations must of moral necessity apply to divisions between groups of GOD's people, but the remedy suggested is not federation or amalgamation.

Nowhere are Christians exhorted to maintain unity with heretics or apostates but, on the contrary, they are not to maintain unity with them. The Church is one, but it is not the oneness of the modern Church union movement, with its disregard of the fundamental teachings of the Word of GOD.

2. The Church is holy. The holiness of the Church is an idea inherited from its predecessor, the congregation of Israel.

Israel was called to be a holy nation, in the sense of separateness from idolatry and sinful practices. The GOD of Israel was portrayed as the Holy One (Isaiah 6:1-13). Places where GOD revealed Himself became holy ground and all the elements of worship in Israel were said to be holy. The prophets, and the apostles after them, labored to impress upon Israel and the Church the conviction that God wants holy people. Local assemblies of believers are to express in their lives and conduct that holiness which God expects in His people and provides for through His Spirit.

J. C. Ryle (Holiness, p. 217) describes the Church in these words: "The Church of our text (Matthew 16:18) is made up of all true believers in the Lord JESUS CHRIST, of all who are really holy and converted people.

- It comprehends all who have repented of sin, and fled to CHRIST by faith, and have been made new creatures in Him.

- It comprises all GOD's elect, all who have received GOD's grace, all who have been washed in CHRIST's blood, all who have been clothed in CHRIST's righteousness, all who have been born again and sanctified by Christ's Spirit.

All such, of every name, and rank, and nation, and people, and tongue, compose the Church of our text. This is the body of CHRIST. This is the flock of CHRIST. This is the bride. This is the Lamb's wife."

Needless to say Ryle is describing a holy Church, not the religious organizations that often go by the name of a Church. A true Church is a holy Church. By appropriate disciplines it will endeavor to maintain both holiness of life and purity of doctrine. The necessity for a holy Church does not arise entirely from the demands of GOD, but also upon holiness as a necessity for the tasks assigned to the Churches. The history of the Church indicates that the holiness of the Church is the best means of convincing a sinful world of its divine character and the best credentials for its message. The ability to produce saintly people is a prime necessity in our world. If the Church is to be accepted as holy, it must be holy. True New Testament Churches will have this distinguishing mark. If this mark is absent, there is no authenticity in name, organization, creed, or historical succession.

3. The Church is apostolic.

E. T. Hiscox (The New Directory for Baptist Churches, pp. 33, 34) says, "It is the claim of the Roman, and of some other prelatical and High-Church communions, that they have an unbroken

succession of ministerial gifts and ordinations direct from the apostles - what is sometimes termed 'the historical episcopate.' And if a succession in the ministry, then a succession largely in Church order, and sacramental efficacy. This claim is historically groundless, and doctrinally useless. But the true apostolicity consists not in succession but in possession, for they who possess and exhibit the doctrines, the spirit and life of the Apostles, have right to claim this mark of a true gospel Church." We are told that the early Church "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). W. H. Griffith-Thomas (The Spirit of GOD) states the true substance of apostolicity when he says, "The Church received the Scriptures from the Lord JESUS CHRIST by the HOLY SPIRIT through His apostles and prophets, and now the function of the Church is to witness to the fact that these are the Scriptures of the apostles and prophets which she has received and of which she is also the keeper and their preserver through the ages for the use by the people of GOD."

Again, he says, "We believe that the Church is apostolic, because it is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The succession is that of truth, and the Church founded by the apostles is still guided by them in their writings as found in the New Testament. So that any apostolic succession cannot be personal, because as apostles the men were unique and had no successors. But there can be apostolic succession by adherence to doctrine and life." (p. 261) Andreas Rinkel says, "The Church of CHRIST is apostolic that is to say, she preaches through the ages the same gospel, fills the same functions and administers the same sacraments, as in the days of the apostles." (The Nature of the Church, Edited by R. N. Flew, p. 151) "The Church is supposed to teach, not the clever guesses of its pastors or the messages demanded by a halfconverted laity, but the truth as it is in JESUS, the truth about GOD and man which He taught to the apostles... That faith the Church must hold if it is to be effective. It is the thing the apostles taught, and they were taught by JESUS CHRIST Himself.

Some sections of CHRIST'S Church have veered away from it. They thereby become ineffective to win the man in the street, just as all Christian groups in days past which have forsaken it have lost their hold on seeking people. Every sort of misstatement, half-statement, and warping of the faith has been seen from time to time during the nineteen centuries of Christendom... The Churches today which fail to teach it are lapsing into vague generalities which mean little."

Bernard Iddings Bell (Religion for Living, pp. 89, 91).

If apostolicity is a mark of the true Church, then the liberal Churches of our day which have departed from, or denied the apostles' doctrines, are not New Testament Churches and should not be recognized as such. The old doctrine of apostolic succession should be dusted off, given a scriptural interpretation, and Churches which have departed from this succession of doctrine and life should be disfellowshipped. The Church is apostolic, and local assemblies which are not apostolic in doctrine and life are not true Churches.

4. The Church is universal.

Unlike the Jewish religious community, and unlike religions which are definitely racial or national, the true Church is universal in its membership, doctrines and objectives. It has no race, nationality or color barriers. Its truths are of universal value, because they are derived from the one true God. They are capable of universal application, hindered not by their limitations, but by sinful man's

unwillingness to accept and practice them. The Church by its nature is and must be universal if it is to meet the need of the whole world.

Thiessen (Lectures in Systematic Theology, p. 407) says, "In the universal sense the Church consists of all those who, in this dispensation, have been born of the Spirit of GOD and have by that same Spirit been baptized into the body of CHRIST" (1 Peter 1:3, 1 Peter 1:22-25; 1 Corinthians 12:13). The universal Church is a conception of the mind, having no real existence in time or place, and not a historical fact-without organization, without action, without corporate being, and without any human head or government. The universal Church has never had a business meeting, nor issued any pronouncements, or encyclicals. The Church is universal, but there is no universal Church.

~ end of chapter 2 ~

03 - The Church Identified

Chapter 3 THE CHURCH IDENTIFIED

“The reformers defined the marks of a true Church (local or regional) as: (1) the pure preaching of the word of GOD (2) the administration of the sacraments according to CHRIST’s ordinance (3) discipline so administered that the evil surviving in believers should be purged out and the good in them fostered and strengthened.” (The Nature of the Church, Edited by R. N. Flew p. 282).

“A visible Church of CHRIST is a congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the Gospel; observing the ordinances of CHRIST, governed by His law, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word.” (New Hampshire Confession Article 16).

“Properly speaking New Testament Christianity knows nothing of the word ‘sacrament,’ which belongs essentially to the heathen world of the Graeco-Roman empire and which unfortunately some of the Reformers unthinkingly took over from the ecclesiastical tradition. For this word, and still more the overtones which it conveys, is the starting point for those disastrous developments which began soon to transform the community of JESUS into a Church which is first and foremost a sacramental Church.” Emil Brunner (Misunderstanding the Church, pps. 72, 73).

“The Church, almost unnoticed becomes a ‘public institution,’ which expresses and satisfies the people’s ‘religious needs,’ instead of being CHRIST’s instrument of salvation.” K. E. Skydsgaard (The Nature of the Church, Edited by R. N. Flew, p. 88).

“Whether we have sought to expand our organizations in the Church through the direct political measures which create state Churches, or have as free Churches entered into competition for popular support with other Christian organizations and also with secular institutions, in any case, we have managed to bring into our Churches many who have made no personal commitment to the Lord and His cause.” H. Richard Niebuhr (Man’s Disorder and GOD’s Design: Amsterdam Report, p. 81).

“What is the trouble with the visible Church? What is the reason for its obvious weaknesses? There are perhaps many causes of weakness. But one cause is perfectly plain - the Church of today has been unfaithful to her Lord by admitting great companies of non-Christian persons, not only into her membership but into her teaching agencies. It is indeed inevitable that some persons who are not truly Christian shall find their way into the visible Church; fallible men cannot discern the heart, and many a profession of faith which seems to be genuine may really be false. But it is not this kind of error to which we now refer. What is now meant is not the admission of individuals whose confessions of faith may not be sincere, but the admission of great companies of persons who have never made any really credible confession of faith at all and whose entire attitude toward the Gospel is the very reverse of the Christian attitude. Such persons, moreover, have been admitted not merely to the membership, but to the ministry of the Church, and to an increasing extent have been allowed to dominate its councils and determine its teaching.” J. Gresham

Machen (Christianity and Liberalism, p. 54).

“All too many preachers have walked out of Churches brokenhearted and feeling it to be the part of humility to bear their sorrow in silence, only to have another and another minister endure the same sorrow at the hands of the same wicked and perverse organization that goes by the name of a Church.” Fredrick K. Stamm (If This Be Religion, p. 54) How can the true Church be identified? How does the Church remain the same Church and yet not the same? If any Church today is a true Church, it is because there is a well established and identifiable continuity with the apostolic Church What is that identity?

- Can it be identified by its name? Not always. Scriptural names are preferable, but Churches which have long ceased to be New Testament Churches may have New Testament names.

- Can it be identified by its form of government? There are Churches with New Testament forms of government which are not New Testament Churches.

- Can it be identified by its Head, the Pope, or by its succession of ordination? Hardly, for a Church may or may not acknowledge the Pope, and this does not constitute apostolic identity.

One may be ordained correctly according to any ecclesiastical rule and still not be a true minister of CHRIST. How can a New Testament Church be identified?

1. A New Testament Church is marked by the true preaching of the Word of GOD.

New Testament Churches were biblical; New Testament preaching was biblical; the New Testament on every page indicates that it is rooted in the Old Testament, the Word of GOD. The Scriptures were authority in the New Testament Churches (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). The New Testament abounds in instructions and admonitions to preach the Word of GOD. Paul exhorts Timothy, “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2-3). The writer to the Hebrews tells us that “the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrows, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Paul asserts that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul writes to Titus as he does to Timothy exhorting him to speak the things which become sound doctrine (Titus 2:1).

R. Newton Flew observes, “It is the undoubted duty of the Church to protect and propagate Christian doctrine in its integrity and incorruptness.” (The Nature of the Church, p. 21) The true preaching of the Word of GOD in its fullness, as recorded in the Scriptures, is a mark of the true Church and sharply distinguishes the true from the false. This does not mean that a true Church must be correct in every detail of doctrine, but it does mean that it wants to be, that it endeavors to be, and that it is sufficiently sensitive to the HOLY SPIRIT to be molded into the kind of Church that GOD wants it to be.

There is a limit beyond which a Church cannot go in the misrepresentation or denial of the truth, without losing her true character and becoming a false Church. This is what happens when the Fundamentals of the faith are denied and holiness of life disappears. Miner Raymond, an old

Methodist theologian says, "An association of individual persons that ignores or contravenes the requirements of GOD's Word, no matter by what name it may be called, is not a Church of GOD, can not claim His sanction, nor expect His promised blessing. It is essential to a divine institution that it be fashioned after the divine pattern in all respects wherein the divine will is revealed. In matters concerning which there is no revelation, the discretion of the Church, in determining what the exigencies of the case require, is the authorized tribunal; and to its authority the individual member is bound to submit." (Systematic Theology, 3:241, 242) The true Church acknowledges and preaches the Word of GOD in its purity.

2. The New Testament Church is known by its scriptural administration of the ordinances. The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper are ordained of GOD, taught in the Word of GOD, and the manner of their administration clearly set forth. These ordinances, based upon the Word of GOD, are not mere religious traditions, hallowed customs, but ordinances significant with meaning and pregnant with spiritual blessing. The ordinances should never be divorced from the Word of GOD, for they derive their meaning from the Word of GOD. The tendency of the modern Church to reduce them to the level of ritual, and little more, is to depart from the Scriptures, to disobey God and disregard the commands of CHRIST. There are some fundamental principles concerning the ordinances which must be re-emphasized in this day when the Word of GOD concerning these matters has come to have little influence. (a) The number of the ordinances. There are two ordinances ordained of CHRIST our Lord in the Gospels: baptism and the Lord's Supper. The five commonly called sacraments: confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction, are not the commands of our Lord but the inventions of men. Many institutions and practices of the Church may be spiritually helpful, but they are not ordinances of the Gospel. (b) The ordinances are commanded (Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34). Since these ordinances have been commanded by divine authority, their observance is not optional for a true disciple of CHRIST, they are mandatory. The rejection of the ordinances is not simply a refusal to follow religious customs but the serious sin of disobedience to GOD. The fact that some have attached too much meaning to the ordinances or permitted them to become empty ritual is not sufficient justification for disobeying God in this respect. (c) These ordinances are Church ordinances. The Report of the Theological Commission on Intercommunion, World Council of Churches, says: "Nothing must be done to obscure the truth that it is Churches and not ecumenical committees or conferences that have the right to celebrate the Lord's Supper." (Intercommunion, p. 39) Again, it says: "There appears to be general agreement on the principle that a body like the World Council of Churches or the World's Student Christian Federation must not, as such, hold its own Communion Services, because such a body is not a Church," (p. 35) We do not agree, however, with the Committee in its suggestion that the Churches can arrange such a communion for the visiting convention, which seems to violate the very nature of the prohibition just laid down. (d) New Testament Churches are alone qualified to conduct the observance of the Lord's Supper, not for the benefit of hundreds whose spiritual state and doctrinal views are unknown, but for its own people and those whom they may permit to share their fellowship. The ordinances are ordinances of the true local Church of CHRIST, and not to be observed in conferences, conventions and vague gatherings of what not. The above Commission observes: "Thus even the ecumenical gatherings (especially conferences of Christian youth), while deeply inspiring to some people, have made a very different impression on others, because they seemed to present the distressing spectacle of a diverse crowd, from many varied Churches and traditions, gathering together at the Lord's Table without any sufficient

unity of belief about what they were doing there! This criticism could be offered concerning many highly advertised united communion services in the liberal groups of our day. The ordinances are ordinances of the local Church, and the local Church has no authority in the Scriptures to extend the hospitality of the Lord's Table to a great host of visiting strangers of whose beliefs and life they know nothing. (e) The ordinances were given to New Testament Churches which bear the marks of a true Church of CHRIST, Churches may be defective in some respects, hold erroneous interpretations of the Scriptures (in all good faith) and still be used by the HOLY SPIRIT for the salvation of men. These Churches which have the fundamental marks of the true Church are qualified to administer the ordinances. In our day we have another type of Church, A Church which does not accept the final authority of the Word of GOD, doubts the virgin birth of CHRIST, questions or perverts the doctrine of the deity of CHRIST, rejects His atoning blood, questions His bodily resurrection, refuses the promise of the second coming of CHRIST - such are not true Churches and have no authority to administer the ordinances of the Gospel. A true Church is marked by the scriptural administration of the ordinances.

3. The true Church is marked by the faithful exercise of scriptural discipline (Matthew 18:15-18; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 1 Corinthians 5:13; 1 Corinthians 14:33, 1 Corinthians 14:40; Revelation 2:14, Revelation 2:15, Revelation 2:20). The doctrine of the external sanctity of the Church is a lost doctrine, and a futile effort is being made to give to the Church a standing in the world which its degree of holiness does not deserve.

There is an attempt being made to give a holiness to the Church which does not involve the holiness of the people in the Church. Scriptural disciplines are necessary to purity of doctrine in the Church, a godly testimony to the world, and a proper observance of the ordinances. To have no rule of doctrine and no rule of life as conditions of membership or participation in the Lord's Supper, is to corrupt the meaning of both, and destroy their spiritual usefulness. Every organization which proposes to work smoothly, and yet efficiently, must have certain rules and regulations to be followed; certain laws for the individual members to obey. There is no society to which these remarks apply more appropriately and with more emphasis than the local Church of Christian believers who profess before the world to have found a Saviour from sin and a superior way of life. When these laws fall into disuse, the message of the Church is corrupted and the lives of its members cease to inspire confidence.

These disciplines can be applied wisely or unwisely. E. T. Hiscox (The New Directory for Baptist Churches, pp. 101, 102) says, "To some the word discipline has an unpleasant sound. It seems punitive. It savors of transgression, conflict and punishment. But Church discipline is not to be taken in this narrow sense alone; nor does it develop these unlovely features, except, where, by the culpable neglect of pastors and others it has fallen into decay, good order and the well-being of the body have been long disregarded, and the Church has become a lawless and disorderly company.

Then a very hasty, and possibly an intemperate effort to make matters right, without sufficient prudence and precaution, may develop difficulties... Whatever the difficulties, in many cases the disciplines of the Word of GOD must be used to restore the Church to health and the Lord's Table to holiness. Hiscox says, "Many a Church has found serious trouble in re-establishing a healthful order and discipline, after long continued neglect and disorder. But many a Church has also found

that a thorough course of Christian labor, and the reestablishment of a healthful scriptural discipline, has brought back to the body order. and harmony, reinvigorated its wasted energies, has produced a better tone of practical piety, and became the precursor of a revival of religion,” A true Church uses scriptural disciplines lovingly and wisely.

~ end of chapter 3 ~

04 - The Ministry of the True Church

Chapter 4 THE MINISTRY OF THE TRUE CHURCH

“It is well to bear in mind that the distinction which has for ages prevailed in Christian society between clergy and laity is not primitive; was not known in the apostolic age. There was an apostleship and a discipleship, but no clerical caste, separated by a wide gulf of sacramental ordination from the common people... The Churches chose for their pastors and teachers such of their own members as exhibited the needed qualities which fitted them for the positions.” E.

T. Hiscox (The New Directory for Baptist Churches, p. 282) “The Jewish and Catholic antithesis of clergy and laity had no place in the apostolic age.” Phillip Schaff (History of the Christian Church, 1:131) “The New Testament never uses the word ‘priest’ to describe the minister. Indeed, in the singular number it is found of CHRIST, and His Priesthood is said to be ‘undelegated’ or intransmissible’ (Hebrews 7:24]. When it is used of the Church it is always in the plural, ‘priests’ (Revelation 1:6), or collectively, ‘priesthood’ (1 Peter 2:5). The truth, therefore, is that Christianity is, not has, a priesthood. The silence of the New Testament on this point is a simple and yet significant fact.

It is what Bishop Lightfoot calls ‘the eloquent silence of the apostolic writings.’“ W. H. Griffith-Thomas (The Principles of Theology, p. 316) “It seems unlikely that modern scholarship, after the closest scrutiny of the documents, can do more than establish two statements as to the place of the Twelve in the Primitive Church. First, they were accorded a certain pre-eminence in the counsels and leadership of the community; second, the exact nature of their authority was undefined.” R. N. Flew, JESUS and His Church, p. 130, 131) “There is no more exalted, honorable and responsible calling among men than that of the Christian minister. He is an ambassador from the King of Heaven to the sons of men [II Corinthians 5:20]. He is a watchman unto GOD’s people (Ezekiel 3:17).

- He is a husbandman, in charge of the Lord’s estate (2 Timothy 2:6).

- He is a steward of the mysteries of GOD, and of the manifold grace of GOD.

- He is a shepherd of the flock of GOD which He hath purchased with His own blood (1 Peter 5:1-4).” Wilson T. Hogue (The HOLY SPIRIT, p. 301) “Hopefully he looks, as the more intelligent of human beings have not looked for many a long year, to the Church and its ministers; but what he hears from them somewhat bewilders him. Can it be that the official proponents of GOD fail to understand the inner need that moves, the hunger that impels him? If often seems to him, from what he sees of Churchmen and from what he hears of what they say that they, too, have slipped their moorings, and are perhaps more adrift than he. Can this be so?... Why do the pulpits resound with lectures on almost every conceivable subject except those deeply spiritual ones which alone can strengthen him for life?... Why must he listen to well-worn minor platitudes, as though the preachers were twittering birds, almost unaware of the swift coming hurricane?” Bernard I. Bell (Religion for Living, pp. xii, xiii) “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of

man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Corinthians 2:4).

"Even in the ordination of ministers the historic creedal standards are evaded with ingenious rationalizations and are almost wholly disregarded." Charles Clayton Morrison (The Unfinished Reformation, p. 45) "A great change has come over the whole of Protestantism in the past half century... A significant clue to the nature of this change is seen in the virtual passing of the heretic." Charles C. Morrison (The Unfinished Reformation, p. 189) 1. The ministry of the true Church is not valid because it is in human succession, but because it has a direct call from GOD. The special call to special service for GOD is well established in both the Old and New Testaments, from Abraham to Paul. It is rooted in the divine election, not in the gifts of the individual.

It depends for implementation on the HOLY SPIRIT in that person, rather than the attractiveness of the natural personality. No ordination, no show of numerical success, no amount of ecclesiastical prestige, no peacock show of scholarship, is a substitute for that elective call of GOD to Christian service. The call may come in various ways, but it must come as a compelling pressure from GOD upon the heart of the believing Christian or he is not a true minister.

2. The ministry of the true Church is not valid because it is in human succession or the recipient of ecclesiastical authority, but because it is based upon a living evangelical experience of GOD in CHRIST.

He must have in his own heart and life what he expects his Gospel to produce in other hearts and lives. Samuel M. Shoemaker, says, "I believe that if the Church is to be re-made and to take hold again in our day, the primary necessity is the conversion of the ministers to a full experience of the Lord JESUS CHRIST." (The Conversion of the Church, p. 45) - It is entirely proper to ask whether any minister has been born again, or if he is living in fellowship with GOD, for if this is not true, he has no credentials. He himself needs healing before he can become a healer of souls. - It is entirely proper to ask whether any Bible scholar, or professor has been born again, for the natural man is not a proper interpreter of Holy Writ (1 Corinthians 2:14). The religious world is too much impressed by the religious views of unregenerate Bible scholars who, without the new birth, have no spiritual discernment into divine truth. A true Church will have a ministry which shares the apostolic experience of GOD which gave the apostles their strength and spiritual authority. No human succession, no ecclesiastical ordination, no scholarship, will atone for this lack. One may be deprived of ecclesiastical credentials, one may be discredited by a human organization and be in apostolic succession, if they have suffered loss for CHRIST and His truth.

3. The ministry of the true Church is not valid because of its ecclesiastical sanctions, but because it preaches the apostolic Gospel.

Gordon Poterat, a liberal writer, observes, "Our Reformation forbears stood behind the Holy Bible and claimed a 'Thus saith the LORD' when they preached their sermons. They were certain that the 'Book' infallibly proclaimed the Lord's injunctions and those who listened shared that conviction. The thunders of the pulpit reverberated in the souls of the people just as Sinai's thunders made the children of Israel tremble in awe. There are still vestiges of this sort of preaching which are fairly widespread but mostly among those who refuse to come to terms with modern biblical scholarship. However, preachers who have received a modern theological

education, though they still stand behind the pulpit Bible when they speak, are unable honestly to preach as if they had in it unquestionable support.” (We Preach Not Ourselves, p. 2) Poteat acknowledges that there is a ministry which no longer preaches the apostolic Gospel, and that the acceptance of biblical criticism has robbed liberalism of its spiritual authority. As a result of the work of the higher critics, the rise of scientific thought, and the destruction of all religious authority, the ministry is confused and uncertain concerning its message. Leland P.

Bechtel (Eastern, Eastern Baptist Seminary, 12-1947) reporting on the North American Interseminary Conference said, “In the student discussion group to which I was assigned there was little agreement as to the exact nature of the Gospel... Lack of agreement as to the Gospel was evident not only in the student interpretation of the platform lectures... but also in the Bible study periods when the nature of the Gospel was discussed.” The liberal ministry of our day, rejecting the Gospel as set forth in the New Testament, has lost its way and lost its divine credentials. Uncertain of its authority, uncertain of its Gospel, the liberal ministry has an uncertain message.

Many who consider themselves evangelicals have watered down the apostolic Gospel until it is only a pale imitation of the real thing. Much that passes for “Gospel preaching” in our day lacks the rich content of the New Testament Gospel, often given to harmless and inoffensive generalities, and, providing an “invitation” is given at the end, will pass for “Gospel” preaching. The evangelical world must restudy the content of apostolic preaching if it expects to be in apostolic succession. A modern writer Daniel T. Niles, calls attention to the evangelical tendency to weaken the presentation of the Gospel, saying, “Often, particularly for the evangelist, the temptation will be strong to make modifications in the Gospel which will make it more acceptable and more reasonable, modifications that will take out of the Gospel its offense. But this temptation must be resisted.” (That They May Have Life, p. 80) Many evangelicals, preaching a shallow Gospel, are credited with being orthodox, but their orthodoxy is superficial indeed. The mere absence of modernistic denials is too often taken as an evidence of orthodoxy. As a result of liberal confusion and evangelical “trimming” the world is largely ignorant of the true meaning of the Gospel. Vincent Taylor (The Apostolic Gospel, p. 3) says of our world, “A generation has arisen which is ignorant of our Gospel and contemptuous of what it believes it to be. It has followed the false gods of materialism, and although the shaking events of our times has left it bewildered and skeptical, it does not believe we have anything relevant to offer.” How can the world take the Gospel seriously when a large portion of the ministry no longer preach it, while others offer only an abridged edition of the Gospel, lacking spiritual power? The ministry of the true Church preaches the apostolic Gospel with certainty and without abridgement.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

05 - The Holy Spirit and the Church

Chapter 5 THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

“Would God that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and the Lord would put His Spirit upon them” (Numbers 11:29)!

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all” (2 Corinthians 13:14).

“There is nothing mechanical, automatic, or self-sustaining about the Church, however; it either lives by the constant supply of power from on high, or it ceases to exist.” J. R. Nelson (The Realm of Redemption, p. 178).

“The HOLY SPIRIT is the very life of the Church as a spiritual society. He is the Spirit of life; and where He is not energetically present, spiritual life is utterly impossible. Exclude the HOLY

SPIRIT from a so-called Christian assembly, and, though it may remain strictly orthodox, absolutely loyal to its early traditions, and may retain the punctual observance of the New Testament forms of worship, spiritually it will be as dead as an Egyptian mummy. Even accession to such an organization only increases the bulk of the carcass.” Wilson T. Hogue (The HOLY SPIRIT, pp. 284, 285).

“The danger of the older, larger, and more thoroughly organized Churches is always in the direction of usurping the place of the Holy Spirit.” W. H. Griffith-Thomas (the Spirit of GOD, p. 263).

“Is it not sad to see the extent to which the equality and priesthood have been lost sight of in the Church of CHRIST? Instead of gathering immediately to CHRIST and seeking the light and power of His Spirit, to qualify us to worship Him aright, we must still look - virtually, if not actually - to some human head or leader, pope or bishop, priest or minister, to do our worshipping for us. We must have buildings, splendid in their architecture and costly in their decorations; we must have beautiful attractions for the eye, and artistic music for the ear; and the time of the public worship must be taken up largely with seeing, and hearing, and doing certain things which have been prescribed and prearranged by others.” Dougan Clark (The Offices of the HOLY SPIRIT, p. 206).

“The HOLY SPIRIT is our only Saviour from the perils of machine administration. Only when He is the motor is the machine worth while.” John Humpstone (The HOLY SPIRIT in Life and Service, by A. C. Dixon and others, p. 115) 1. The Church was formed by the HOLY SPIRIT (Acts 2:1-47). The New Testament records the constituting of the Church on the day of Pentecost by the HOLY SPIRIT (1 Corinthians 12:13), and thereafter the Spirit abides in every Church composed of true believers, governing it, providing for its spiritual needs and blessing its efforts for CHRIST.

2. The HOLY SPIRIT abides in the true Christian Church. Every believer is a temple of GOD (1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 6:9). Each believer is joined with other believers in a true Christian

fellowship which becomes a habitation of the Spirit of GOD. It is idle to talk of fellowship in the Church, or fellowship between the Churches, apart from the Spirit of GOD. Christian fellowship is not simply the expression of common interests, but love for a common Lord and CHRIST, and indwelt by the same Spirit. Religious organizations not composed of true believers possessed of the HOLY SPIRIT are not true Churches.

3. The HOLY SPIRIT builds up the Church. "By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Corinthians 12:13). "They that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added to them about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41). "And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). By adding believer to believer to CHRIST and the Church, the Church is enlarged and the local assembly strengthened. It is clear that the New Testament Church is a gathered Church, consisting of those who are saved and baptized. The New Testament knows nothing of any other pattern. When Churches are built up by purely human means, apart from the Spirit of GOD, a worldly, compromising Church is created which dishonors the Lord and corrupts the Christian faith.

4. The HOLY SPIRIT administers the true Church. "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (Acts 13:2). "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches" (Revelation 3:6). The HOLY SPIRIT has been called the "Executive of The Godhead" and He is the One who makes the Lordship of CHRIST real to the local assembly and effective in its affairs. Liberal groups of our day, denying the personality of the HOLY SPIRIT and consequently His sovereignty, have only an idealistic conception of the Lordship of CHRIST over the Church which lacks effectiveness.

Evangelicals acknowledge the personality of the HOLY SPIRIT, but too often refuse to accept His sovereignty and proceed presumptuously to expect His blessings on their humanly devised schemes. The history of the Church is filled with the wrecks of men's ideas, ill-conceived projects which failed and the religious notions of men which have no divine sanction. The true Church acknowledges JESUS CHRIST as Head and the HOLY SPIRIT as Administrator.

5. The HOLY SPIRIT maintains the unity of the Church. The family of the redeemed have a spiritual unity because of their relationship, but local groups of believers must depend upon the HOLY SPIRIT in their midst to give and keep them in spiritual unity with CHRIST and each other. W. H. Griffith-Thomas says truly, "He who unites each believer to CHRIST and to his fellow-believers undertakes the work of maintaining those believers and communities united in CHRIST as the prime secret of blessing and power." (The HOLY SPIRIT of GOD, p. 171) Paul writes to the Ephesians: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:1-6). The unity here is not organic but spiritual; it is not based upon compromise but truth - it is a unity of obedience to one Lord, of people holding one faith. Local assemblies of believers who follow human leaders instead of one Lord; who become a collection of self-willed individuals instead of obedient children; who do not seek and follow the leadership of the HOLY

SPIRIT, will not enjoy this unity which is the privilege of every group of true believers. The HOLY SPIRIT unites the Church on one faith. Any other unity is of man and will not have the blessing of GOD.

6. The HOLY SPIRIT preserves the Church from apostasy. Churches lose the presence and the fellowship of the HOLY SPIRIT before they lose their orthodoxy. Wilson T. Hogue (The HOLY SPIRIT, p. 294) says, "Those who quench the Spirit, grieve the Spirit, resist the Spirit, vex the Spirit, by following after carnal things, by the indulgence of fleshly dispositions, by manifesting unholy tempers, words, or actions, by any kind of compromising with iniquity, cannot enjoy the immunity from being corrupted, or led astray by error, of which we have been speaking. He is preeminently the HOLY SPIRIT; and to enjoy His ministry in the heart whatsoever is known or believed to be unholy must be put away forever from our lives." The HOLY SPIRIT properly recognized and honored is the best security against false doctrine and apostasy. The HOLY SPIRIT grieved, neglected, sinned against weakens the defenses of the Churches against apostasy.

Today the professed Church is filled with a collection of believers, heretics, apostates, and worldlings of various shades and degrees, and spiritual discernment seems to have sunk to a new low in Christendom. Even many evangelical believers have a strange blindness which prevents them from detecting the false and identifying the true. The cults of the day have drawn their strength from the Churches, Churches of low spiritual state and doctrinally untaught. The rapid spread of heresies and the prevalence of apostasy in religious circles is undoubtedly related to the low spiritual state of the Churches. It is the HOLY SPIRIT who preserves Churches from apostasy, more effectively than creeds and the soundest of confessional documents, for there is no affinity between the HOLY SPIRIT and the prevailing unbelief in religious circles. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

~ end of chapter 5 ~

06 - The Church and the Churches: The Problem of Christian Unity

Chapter 6 THE CHURCH AND THE CHURCHES: THE PROBLEM OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

“The fundamental problem of the Church is the existence of the Churches.” (Man’s Disorder and GOD’s Design: Amsterdam Report, p. 17).

“There are two opposite errors on the whole subject which, always observable, are very prominent in modern times. One is the overvaluation of the importance of unity, as uniformity. This is rebuked by reason, Scripture, and the evidence of the fact that the HOLY GHOST does administer the work of CHRIST by sects and divisions. Much of the progress of the Gospel, and many of its most glorious achievements, at home and abroad, may be traced to the labors of Christian societies to a great extent independent of each other.

“But undervaluation of it is equally wrong. Though variety is ordained of GOD, the nearer to uniformity, or at least to thorough mutual recognition, the estate of Christendom can be made the better will it be for its peace and dignity and prosperity.” W. B. Pope (A Compendium of Christian Theology, p. 275).

“The Almighty has always preferred union when men were disposed to do right, but disunion when they were engaged in wickedness.” Thomas W. Phillips (The Church of CHRIST, p. 305) “Though divisions have tended to obscure the ideal oneness of the Church and divert attention from it even as - an ideal, the very fact of division is an evidence of the seriousness with which Protestants take the concept of the Church. Every division has been the result of an effort to purify the Church or restore to it some precious element of its heritage that seemed to have been lost.” W. E. Garrison (A Protestant Manifesto, p. 120) “Among the suggested remedies for the present ills of Christianity one which finds many advocates today is Church union. The suggestion merits serious and indeed favorable consideration. The fact should not be overlooked, however, that the heightened interest in ecumenical Christianity with a view to the promotion of Church union is in part, and perhaps in the first instance one of the symptoms of the present debilitated condition of the various branches of the Christian Church... It is one of the more constructive phases of a strategic retreat,” Douglas Clyde Macintosh (Personal Religion, p. 238).

“Luther did not want to form a separate Church; he was a monk and at first intended to remain a monk, reforming the Church of his faith from within... Calvinistic Christians in England, impatient with the general strategy of waiting for reform within the Church of England, separated themselves out of the general group of Calvinists, for which they received the name of Separatists, eventually named Congregationalists... Methodism, not originally intended to be a separate Church, was founded by John Wesley,” Robert S. Billheimer (The Quest for Christian Unity, pp. 14, 18, 19).

“My soul has been chilled by a decadent ecclesiasticism,” Fredrick K. Stamm (If This Be Religion, p. 25) In the early centuries of the Church, denominations did not exist, consequently there is no New Testament basis for denominationalism. In the larger sense, there was unity, and heresy and heretics played only a minor part in the Church life of those early centuries. The seeds of division,

however, are seen in the New Testament where men were prone to follow human leaders, where heresies arise which, farther removed from the apostles, would flourish and gain many adherents. It can be said that, while there were emerging schools of thought, there were no recognized denominations.

Eventually, divisive factors became important and the first great division occurred between Eastern and Western Catholicism, a division which exists to this day. The Reformation under Luther and others produced a number of new groups which were separate from the Roman Church. The march of denominationalism had begun!

Many reformatory movements such as Methodism and others eventually crystallized into separate religious groups. The (now) strongly ecumenical Congregationalists began as Separatists, or Independents, now a term of disapproval in liberal circles. Many denominations had their beginnings in national or racial groups. Other groups owe their existence to some human leader, wise or unwise. The differences between some denominations are vital and to be respected; the differences between others are unimportant and there is no reason for their separate existence.

Denominational names, even scriptural names, have largely lost their meaning in our day and must be supported by adjectives or carefully distinguished to avoid confusion - they are more of a nuisance than a blessing in the religious world. Church leaders can hardly claim to have a cure for the disorder of the secular world when they have no solution for the problem in their own small ecclesiastical households of faith. The Christian world is cluttered up with religious antiques, needless divisions and a Babel terminology. The need for Christianity unity is great and beyond dispute, but the problems are many. The Need 1. The primary reason for unity is that our testimony for CHRIST might be more effective. "That they may all be one as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may also be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). This prayer is not for oneness of organization as it is commonly interpreted by liberal leaders of the ecumenical movement, but a spiritual oneness that defies explanation or definition, the oneness of GOD and Son. Believers who are hid with CHRIST in GOD (Colossians 3:3) are the ones for whom this unity is desired by CHRIST, not the worldly mixture which is found in the Churches today.

While this prayer does not primarily refer to the organic unity of the Churches, which at best can never approximate the unity described here, yet there is every reason to think that our Lord desired the outward unity of His people when that unity is based upon the Word of GOD, loyalty and devotion to our Lord, and fidelity to the fundamental doctrines of the faith.

Churches of like faith should not permit mere human differences to keep them apart. The purpose of such unity is not that men may believe in the Church, nor extend the power of the Churches, but that men might believe in the Lord and CHRIST whom we preach. One does not have to be an advocate of the modern ecumenical movement, to assert that the 148 groups which form the World Council of Churches have no scriptural right to continue as separate bodies. One does not have to be an "ecumaniac" to assert that the hundreds of denominations in this country have no justification in Scripture or logic. Unity, however, must not be purchased at the cost of sacrificing fundamental doctrines of the faith, for the resulting unity would be unblest of GOD. God prefers disunion for the rebellious (Genesis 6:1-22).

2. Division breeds its own evils, however justifiable the original causes may have been. There is an immense amount of wasted time and energy spent in trying to understand the minute doctrinal and organizational differences between these groups. These divisions confuse an already confused world. It is very difficult for the average man to understand the differences between General Baptists, Regular Baptists, Conservative Baptists, North American Baptists, Southern Baptists, American Baptists, Bible Baptists, Free Will Baptists, United Baptists, primitive Baptists and many others. The same could be said of Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Mennonites and others. The economic waste of such endless divisions is enormous, with their separate ecclesiastical structures, their separate publishing enterprises, separate Church structures, separate mission societies and many other forms of waste. Again, we agree that waste is preferable to the surrender of precious convictions of truth, but in many cases these separate convictions do not exist. We are not pleading that truth and principle be sacrificed to unity, but we do assert that, where these differences are not vital, that the Spirit of GOD leads toward unity.

3. Divisions among GOD's people hinder the accomplishment of Christian tasks. Some communities are over-Churched, while others are under-Churched. Many home mission tasks are not being done, many orphanages are not being established, many slum areas have no missions, many things too numerous to mention are not being done for which the Churches are responsible to GOD. Divisions between GOD's people that hinder the work of GOD are not justified.

There are divisions which forward the work of GOD. Many over-Churched communities will be invaded by new organizations preaching the Gospel, because the Churches of that community have substituted religious notions for the Word of GOD. Such conditions both produce and perpetuate separation. It is always the duty of GOD's people to enter into any community regardless of the number of Churches if the Churches are not preaching the true Gospel. Care should be taken however, that this be the true motive for the new organization and not the enlargement of a denomination.

Liberal congregations which no longer have any doctrines to divide them might well unite. Just why liberals, with few convictions and no theological differences to divide should cling so tenaciously to their separate denominational identities has always been a puzzle to Biblebelieving people. The amazing unanimity among liberals on the ecumenical movement, and the few unions among them are hard to explain. Liberals with nothing to divide them might as well unite. Evangelicals of the same faith and not separated by vital convictions owe it to their Lord to be one in the sight of GOD and man. The Scriptural Basis of Unity 1. The basis of Christian unity. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16). "The faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 1:3). Thomas W. Phillips says truly, "The basis for the union of Christians must be a Christian basis. Among all the conventions that have been called for the union of different sects and parties they have never adopted a Christian basis. They have always attempted to form a human platform on which to unite, and, consequently, have always failed." (The Church of CHRIST, p. 311) He says further, "The Christian Church is a divine institution, and therefore it must have a divine constitution." (p. 311) The true basis of Christian unity must be the final authority of the Scriptures in faith and practice. There will always be permitted a reasonable latitude of interpretation due to the frailties of the human mind and the difficulty of exact interpretation, but this latitude of interpretation must not

be used to deny the Fundamentals of the faith, to pervert the doctrines of the faith, or to rob the Christian faith of its original content as in the case of modernism, liberalism, neo-orthodoxy and other cults.

2. The basis of Christian unity must be the acceptance of the full New Testament stature of CHRIST as recorded and interpreted by the four evangelists and the apostles. Since CHRIST is the very Son of GOD (John 3:16), the Head of the Church (Colossians 1:18), the One who, with authority, gave the commission to the Church (Matthew 28:18-20), the position that unity must rest upon a full conception of His deity and authority is inescapable. To take any other position, or to allow too much latitude of interpretation here, is to be guilty of treason to our Lord. True Christian unity cannot compromise on the New Testament teachings concerning our Lord.

3. The basis of true Christian unity must include the autonomy of the local congregation of true believers, rejecting hierarchies and ecclesiastical authority over the Churches of CHRIST. The local government and final authority of the New Testament Churches is not an accident of history, but a divine provision against ecclesiasticism, the lessening of local responsibility to GOD for doctrine and practice, and total apostasy. New Testament congregations were independent, local assemblies, associating together voluntarily, with their group decisions advisory in nature (Acts 15:1-41). Christian unity must include this independence and direct responsibility of GOD for doctrine and life. (See *The Independence of the Local Church* by the author.) 4. The possibility and shadow of apostasy constantly threatens the peace and purity of the Churches. Paul, in the days of the early Church, warned against these things and even predicted their coming. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons" (1 Timothy 4:1-2). "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves... having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2 Timothy 3:1, 2 Timothy 3:5). Peter and Jude sound the same note of warning and justify the rejection of heretics and apostates who threaten the peace and purity of the Churches.

True Christian unity cannot include apostasy, even though it is cloaked in religious language and enjoys ecclesiastical sanction. The modern ecumenical movement has no safeguards against apostasy and no testimony against apostasy, and its latitudinarianism may lead it into apostasy.

Christian unity, beyond all question, must be thoroughly Christian in the biblical sense.

Four Types of Religious Unity The new emphasis upon the Church has brought into being four types of movements toward religious unity.

1. The one true Church type. The Roman Catholic Church, and certain other groups take the position that they have the true form and doctrines of the Church, a valid ministry, and those who desire the unity of the Church should unite with them. Robert S. Billheimer (*The Quest for Christian Unity*, pp. 5, 6) says, "The Roman Catholic Church is not a party to the present ecumenical movement. She is not by her own choice and by virtue of her own position. From her viewpoint she is the only true Church on earth, CHRIST having passed His authority and His work exclusively to her. Union with Rome is possible, and can be discussed, only on the basis of a return to her basic position. She cannot and will not talk with Churches which demand that they be recognized as Churches. She can only as the true and righteous talk with the schismatic and

heretic, with a view to their correction. For this reason the Roman Church does not appear in ecumenical discussion.” Churches which believe they are the only true Church may be very close to the New Testament pattern, but will have little success in getting others to leave all and follow them.

2. The liberal universal type. The World Council, the various national councils, the state and city councils, are based upon the idea that all Church groups are a part of the universal Church, which they conceive to be the body of CHRIST, regardless of differences in belief or manner of life. The basis of membership in such unions is vague and plausibly simple to secure harmony. The underlying basis of fellowship is not a common faith in the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith but a common task. The organization is generally indifferent to belief or unbelief.

3. The inclusive evangelical type. Such evangelicals think there is a real need for a united evangelical front against modernism, for united action in certain fields of service, and a united testimony on certain issues. They are commonly organized on a confessional basis, professing faith in the Fundamentals of the Christian faith as held by true evangelicals through the years. In the interests of a united front, Churches and individuals can subscribe to these Fundamentals, and at the same time serve and support denominational organizations which do not subscribe to these Fundamentals, and even deny them. Churches and individuals can give a portion of their income to the evangelical cause, while the rest of their contributions are used to support the very thing against which the evangelical fellowships are organized, making for confusion. This basic contradiction is seen in every department of the work of such fellowships. The inclusive evangelical fellowships, attempting to hold consistent evangelicals in the same fellowship with inconsistent evangelicals, are continually in a state of tension between principle and practice. It cannot be thoroughly inclusive, it dare not be consistently exclusive in harmony with its theological confession. Unable to unite evangelicals on the basis of truth consistently applied, it appeals for love to overlook the violation of truth.

4. The exclusive evangelical type. These groups extend membership to such Churches which subscribe to their confession of faith and refuse fellowship to those who deny the Fundamentals of the faith, thus making religious fellowship confessional rather than experiential or expedient. This makes for consistency between profession and practice; between principle and policy.

~ end of chapter 6 ~

07 - The Developing Catholicism of Liberal Ecumenicity

Chapter 7 THE DEVELOPING CATHOLICISM OF LIBERAL ECUMENICITY

“We must not overrate the position and importance of the Church. It is only too possible to do this. But it will mean spiritual loss and disaster. If we exalt the Church we are likely to forget CHRIST. High views of the Church often mean low views of CHRIST. If we emphasize the Church as the depository of Grace between the sinner and the Saviour we may easily shut CHRIST out of the sinner’s view. But if we exalt CHRIST the Church finds her proper place. If we honor CHRIST, we shall value the Church aright.” W. H. Griffith-Thomas, (The Catholic Faith, p. 128) “The moment form takes precedence over content religious faith begins to expire. And if preoccupation with form becomes so complete that it results in form being mistaken for content, then faith is already dead. This happened on a wide scale in Europe during the latter part of the fifteenth century, and produced the Protestant Reformation. It is happening on a wide scale now.” Francis P. Miller (The Church Against the World, by Niebuhr, Pauck and Miller, p. 80).

“Another suggestion, innocent enough and even valuable as a subsidiary measure, is that we need an ‘enriched ritual’ of public worship. But if it be supposed that the one great need of our Protestant Christianity is to have a more aesthetic service of worship, there hardly could be a greater mistake. What is needed is new life and motivation from within, rather than the putting on of an artificial show of piety and zealous devotion. Let the typical, spiritually anaemic Church of today paint her cadaverous countenance with the rouge of an ‘enriched ritual’; she will scarcely for all that hide from the world or from herself, not to speak of hiding from GOD, the melancholy fact that through her own folly she has lost her health and vigor, that she is in a serious state of decline, and that if her malady be not arrested, her sickness may indeed prove to be unto death. The mask of an ‘enriched ritual’ will not be enough.” Douglas Clyde Macintosh (Personal Religion, pp. 239, 240).

“Feeling its way, and lacking in precise terminology, the Amsterdam Assembly defined these different viewpoints as the ‘Catholic’ and ‘protestant: Those at the Assembly and many since have expressed their dissatisfaction with these terms, but for want of better ones they must be used.

They are meant to indicate not two distinct Churches, nor in a wholly precise fashion even two groups of Churches. They are rather meant to indicate two typical, coherent ways of looking at the Christian faith, which are roughly adopted by different groups of Churches.” (Robert S.

Billheimer (The Quest for Christian Unity, p. 66).”A Protestantism which survives as a pale and broken shadow of Catholicism has lost its reason for existence. For a while it will go on with its pious liturgies, dishonest ‘orthodoxy’, vague and inane moralism, and its ludicrous bid for power in society. Then, it will either become truly Catholic or die in disgrace.” Joseph Haroutunian (Wisdom and Folly in Religion, p.22).

“The opinion that the institutional Church is the incarnation, that is, the ‘concretely historical form, the form of a servant in which JESUS CHRIST is historically manifest, amounts to nothing less

than a denial that the apostolic Ecclesia is a real fact of history. The New Testament writings with their picture of the Ecclesia shows that the Lord created for himself a body which was certainly not a Church, but a spiritual communion of persons. The opinion that to take seriously the incarnation requires that one should vindicate ecclesiasticism and allow the historical Church to be the necessary embodiment of the exalted Lord, overlooks the fact that He was truly embodied in the Ecclesia, but that this embodiment, the Ecclesia, had not the character which it later assumed: the character of an institution." Emil Brunner (*Misunderstanding the Church*, pp.

85, 86).

"The Church, as we have conceived it, includes all men. Men do not come into it, because they are in it. The possession of humanity is possession of redeemed humanity, in an age of redemption, in a redeemed world." (p. 62) "... For two thousand years now it has been recognized that the whole world has been redeemed. Any other idea with its ensuing conduct is out of date." (p. 63) "... There is a Church because all mankind is newly created. This new folk is the Church. 'Christians' are merely those who recognize the new mankind. Jews and Pagans belong to it, but their subjective participation is defective. They are belated and premature." (p.

65, 66) Clifford 1. Stanley (*Christian Faith and Social Action*, Edited by John A. Hutchinson).

"The ecumenical movement is like a team of wild horses: motion is assured, the problem being which direction it will take." Robert S. Billheimer (*The Quest for Christian Unity*, p. 103) Liberalism, formerly indifferent to the Church and, forgetting the dangers to the Christian faith and to the human spirit from an organized Catholicism, is now steadily moving toward a Catholic, ritualistic, sacramentarian, hierarchical Churchism, with a minimal doctrinal position liberal Catholicism. This liberal Catholicism is a synthetic unity of human opinions, rather than a unity based upon the acceptance of all the truths of divine revelation. It is inclusive, not the inclusivism of a common faith, but an inclusivism based upon the premise that all truth is relative, and without final authority. It is based upon the new idea that differences concerning the interpretation of the Christian faith, formerly considered vital and exclusive, are not vital and should not exclude.

Liberal Catholicism is developing a Catholic doctrine of the Church which will give it an authority over the human spirit based upon a sanctity which it does not actually possess. It is a false sanctity because a worldly, compromising, half-believing Church cannot be the medium of grace and the voice of GOD to the human spirit.

1. The body of CHRIST is now said by many to be the universal, visible Church with all its doctrinal and moral impurities - a nonethical conception of the Church. Gustaf Aulen of the Lutheran Church of Sweden says, "When the Church is called the body of CHRIST, that means first of all that CHRIST and the Church belong together as an inseparable unity. Where CHRIST is, there is also His Church: and where the Church is, there CHRIST is found also... CHRIST is incarnate in His Church." (*Man's Disorder and GOD's Design: Amsterdam Report*, p. 19). An American liberal, Charles Clayton Morrison (*What is Christianity*, p. 156) presents the same idea, which he erroneously attributes to Paul. "Paul's conception of the incarnation as the body of CHRIST is thoroughgoing. He completely identifies CHRIST with the Church, the Church with CHRIST. He knows no Church apart from CHRIST and no CHRIST apart from the Church." The New Testament teaches no such thing, Morrison and all others, notwithstanding! Such a high view of

the Church, and consequently, a low view of the CHRIST, is spiritually pernicious and socially harmful as history attests. In pulling the Church up to the level of CHRIST, CHRIST is reduced to the level of the Church!

2. The new Catholicism would make the experience of being “in CHRIST” a Church relationship rather than a covenant relationship between CHRIST and the individual. Paul undoubtedly thought and taught that the phrase “in CHRIST” was descriptive of an individual experience received directly and not mediated through a sacramental Church or “redemptive fellowship.” This was certainly true in his case. To him being “in CHRIST” described an individual relationship between the believing individual and His redeeming Saviour. Liberal Catholicism would have it otherwise. J. Robert Nelson (Realm of Redemption, p. 86) commenting on this development of ecclesiastical thought, says, “Instead of a union between the individual and CHRIST, we now see the individual in relation to the community, which is the body of CHRIST. In short, Paul’s phrase ‘in Christ’ is said by many to be equivalent of ‘in the Church.’” But the new liberal Catholicism marches on!

3. The new Catholicism makes the Church “the extension of the Incarnation.” John A. F. Gregg (Man’s Disorder and GOD’s Design, p. 59) says, “The Church is the extension in time and space of the Incarnate Word of GOD, crucified, ascended, glorified, operating among men through the indwelling in them of His HOLY SPIRIT.” J. S. Whale asserts that the “Church is rightly known by all Christians as an extension of the Incarnation.” (Christian Doctrine, p. 140).

Karl Barth was reported as warning delegates at Amsterdam to “fear such phrases as the Church ‘the continuation of the Incarnation.’ We must ever distinguish between CHRIST on high and our Christian ecclesiastical life.” (Southern Presbyterian Journal, 9-15-1948) Yet a Southern Baptist scholar (W. O. Carver in The Nature of the Church, Edited by R. N. Flew. p. 293) says, “As a rule we do not think of the Church as a local ‘continuation of the Incarnation.’ Nor do most Baptists conceive of the Church (the entire body of believers) as the ‘continuation of the Incarnation.’ But it is the conviction of an increasing number of us that this is a thoroughly scriptural and highly important way of conceiving the Church.” Here is an illustration of the drift toward Catholic views of the Church among liberal Baptists.

There are objections to this view of the Church, even among the liberals. As Karl Barth expresses this relationship, JESUS CHRIST is the heavenly Head of the Church; but the Church is, “as His earthly body, bound to Him as such, and yet as such distinct from Him, who possess the Church in Himself, but not the Church Him in herself, between whom and her there is no reversible, interchangeable relationship, as certainly as the relationship between master and servant is not reversible.” (The Doctrine of the Word of GOD, p. 113) J. Robert Nelson says, “As Head of the Body, then CHRIST is both distinct from the Body and inseparable from it. He unites the body in Himself, and is yet not to be identified with it. His Spirit gives the Church life and direction, but He is not the soul of the Church. Again the paradoxical relationship of CHRIST to the Church, the Head to the Body, becomes manifest.”

Again he says, “However much CHRIST may need the Church as the instrument of His redemptive work in the world, therefore, it remains subordinate to Him in nature, drawing whatever meaning and value it has from its relation to Him. The Body lives only because it draws power from the Head, but it is not identical with the Head.” (The Realm of Redemption, pp. 93, 95) The concept of the Church as the “extension of the Incarnation” leads back to Rome!

4. The new Catholicism defined. Walter M. Horton, (*Realistic Theology*, pp. 142, 143) who thinks his theology is realistic (whatever that means) says of the Church, "All that we have said of the work of CHRIST applies, therefore, to the work of the Church except that the Church can have only one founder, one 'chief corner-stone:' (1) The Church continues CHRIST's work of mediation between God and man; it makes the life of GOD more and more immanent and actual in human life. (2) The Church continues the work which was so important a part of his Galilean ministry, that of bringing new power and forgiveness to individuals who are bound in fetters of evil habit. (3) The Church continues the work which led him to the Cross, that of defying and breaking the power of evil social customs and institutions.

One might go on, indeed, to note that all theological concepts which apply to CHRIST, so also apply to the Church. If GOD becomes manifest and incarnate in CHRIST, so also in the Church; if CHRIST has two natures, divine and human, so has the Church, if he has power to forgive sin, make atonement, and bestow saving grace, so has the Church. For the Church is the body of which he is the head, the organism through which he continues to live and act, 'even unto the end of the world.' The view just defined undoubtedly has more affinity with medieval Catholic realism than with Protestant individualism and nominalism." This is a strange doctrine for those who trace their ancestry back to the Reformation.

Again, a professor in a Baptist Seminary (of all places) voices the Catholic view of the Church.

C. G. Rutenber, professor of the Philosophy of Religion, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, says, "To remind ourselves that the Church is the present body of CHRIST His continuing body in history, is inevitably to invite comparison between His then-body and His now-body. The same divine love and life and wisdom which became flesh in the biological body of JESUS

CHRIST is now flesh in His present body, the Church. The Church as the body of CHRIST is the continuation of the incarnation, and of the atonement and of the resurrection. Its life and love and mind are CHRIST's life and love and mind. The resurrection and ascension of CHRIST does not mean that He has abandoned the world.

Rather through His body, the Church, He is reaching out to mend and heal and save. The love that redeems (the atoning event) must be love which is seen and revealed anew through His present body, the Church (imitating and reenacting community)." (*The Dagger and the Cross*, p. 61) Here is the new Catholicism, not from the pen of a Roman priest as the words might indicate, but from the pen of a Baptist professor in a Baptist seminary. The drift toward Catholicism is on in all liberal groups.

5. The new Catholicism tends to make the Church the medium through which the gift of the HOLY SPIRIT is received. Herbert W. Schneider (*Religion in Twentieth Century America*, pp. 150-155) calls attention to the growth of liturgy and ritualism in Protestant Churches. He refers to the liberal Catholic trend in theology, "which implies an acceptance of modernism in the field of historical criticism and ritualism in the art of worship," a trend which is very noticeable in those Churches which seem to be moving into the new Catholicism. Speaking of the Episcopalians, he says, "In their Catholic zeal some of the Episcopalians have exceeded the Roman Catholics in championing the 'corporate' channels of grace or sacraments." He quotes Theodore Wedel (*The Coming Great Church*, p. 60) as saying, "The HOLY SPIRIT is henceforth a corporate, not individual possession.

Church and HOLY SPIRIT are from this point on inseparable... Apart from the corporate community, there is no gift of the HOLY SPIRIT.”

Men who call themselves “evangelicals” among liberals, are becoming Catholic rather than evangelical, for these tendencies will destroy the evangelical faith unless checked. Christendom is well on its way to the great apostasy, embracing the heresies of Romanism, while rejecting its orthodoxy. A cold, high-Churchism threatens Protestantism, as sterile as all high-Churchisms have been in the past. The New Testament doctrine of the Church stands in deadly peril in the house of its professed friends.

~ end of chapter 7 ~

08 - Summary

SUMMARY “During the Boxer Rebellion hundreds, probably thousands of Chinese Christians were martyred.

There they knelt, with their heads on the block, the knives trembling in the hands of their executioners. All they needed to do was grunt out a Chinese word that meant 'I recant' and their lives would be saved. Now, what should I have done under these circumstances? And I speak not simply personally, but in a representative capacity, for I think the rest of you are very much like myself. With my head on the block I suspect I would have said, 'Hold on! I think I can make a statement that will be satisfactory to all sides.” F. J. McConnell. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:3-4).

1. The Church of the New Testament was a Messianic community claiming the spiritual promises to Israel, and professing to be the fulfillment of many of its prophesies. In spiritual heritage, in original membership, it was vitally related to Israel.
2. The Church is presented in the New Testament under many figures of speech, thus giving to the people of GOD a rich description of its nature and character.
3. True Churches can be identified by certain marks of spiritual authenticity, so that men may know the true Churches from the false Churches. A true Church preaches the pure Word of GOD, properly administers the divinely given ordinances, and applies the doctrinal and moral disciplines of the Word of GOD, keeping its doctrine pure and its life consistent.
4. The ministry of a true Church is called of GOD, has a truly evangelical Christian experience, preaches the apostolic Gospel under the anointing of the Spirit of GOD, and seeks to get men to prepare to meet their GOD by salvation of their souls through the atoning CHRIST.
5. True Christian unity, based upon a firm and clear acceptance of the great doctrines of the Christian faith should be the hope and prayer of every Christian heart, and encouraged by every Christian leader. At the same time unscriptural unity must be rejected, dangerous compromises refused, and human schemes examined critically, keeping in mind the possibility of apostasy.
6. The liberal theological movement with its stress upon religious unity independent of acceptance of fundamental Christian doctrines, seems to be leading to that predicted apostasy of the Church against which we are warned in Holy Writ. The new Catholicism, giving a sanctity to an institution apart from sanctified individuals, giving spiritual authority to an ecclesiastical organization composed of fallible and sinful men, leads inevitably to a cold, sterile, highChurchism, whose perils are illustrated in the coldness of Unitarianism, the emptiness of ritualism, the moral

impotency of a corrupt Catholicism. True believers must not accept a false unity, unknown in Scripture and potential in apostate tendencies. The doctrine of the Church in our times as set forth in the New Testament is in peril in the house of its professed friends.

~ end of book ~

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