

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

never be real sacraments this will not really solve the problem. For the C.S.I. have already said that they claim the freedom to make certain exceptions to the rule of episcopal ordination even after the thirty years. For instance, if the Moderator of the Church of Scotland were to visit India after that period they would wish to be free to invite him to celebrate. And it has been already pointed out above that if such a rigid view had been imposed from the beginning, the union could never have taken place.

But is it reasonable, without encouraging indiscriminate "open communion", or losing our faith in the value of episcopacy as an essential part of the fullness of the Church, to allow certain exceptions to the episcopal rule of order? Surely it is, if we realize as they have from the beginning in South India, that we are taking part in a dynamic movement, and will fetter the Holy Spirit at our peril. Through the readiness of the Anglicans in South India to recognize the orders of the other uniting Churches, half a million people have already been brought within an episcopal Church who were previously outside. The C.S.I. now believe that if they shew the like charity towards their non-episcopal parents, they too may in due course be led to follow their example and to unite on an episcopal basis. Should we for this reason deny full fellowship ourselves to the C.S.I.? The verdict of history may well be that it is not we who have the right to set ourselves up as judges of the C.S.I., but rather that we shall ourselves be judged by our readiness to respond to the work of the Spirit as we have seen it in them.

The Biblical Doctrine of the Church

BY THE REV. R. E. HIGGINSON, M.A., B.D.

I

IN building a church THE SITE is all important. Unless there is a rock foundation, the edifice will move during the long years of its existence. A crowning illustration of this truth is seen in Durham. The massive Norman Cathedral, erected in the eleventh century, stands secure against the ravages of time. The Castle, built in the seventeenth century, is constantly in need of attention because of a shifting foundation.

"Upon this rock I will build My Church," said the Lord to Peter. What did He mean? He did not say, "upon *thee*, Peter, I will build My Church," but upon "*this rock*". What is the rock? There is a play on words here in the manner of the Hebrew prophets—*petra*=*petros*. In this form of humour they made their point sharp to pierce the dull minds of their listeners. Such a pronouncement lines up with the new name given to Simon, bar Jonah, "thou shalt be called Cephas=a stone" (John i. 42). Yet Peter himself never claims to be the rock foundation of the Church of Christ. His recorded preaching in the Acts is silent about any such position or prerogative. His recorded letters to the churches contain no mention of such a promise. Rather he speaks of himself, in company with other believers, as

"living stones", and Christ Jesus as God's "chief corner stone" and the "head of the corner" in the spiritual temple which was God's true sanctuary (1 Peter ii. 4-10). In keeping with this is St. Paul's doctrine of the Church outlined in the Epistle devoted to that great theme, where he expressly declares that "the household of God" is "being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians ii. 19-20).

Peter is a foundation of a kind, along with the other apostles; if we may use the term, "an *instrumental* foundation". His use of the keys to open the door of the Kingdom of God on two occasions proves the instrumental character of his authority. At Pentecost he opened the Kingdom to the Jews by his proclamation of the Gospel, and in the representative convert from heathenism, Cornelius, he opened the Kingdom to the Gentile world. He also closed the door of the Kingdom to Ananias and Sapphira for their sin of lying to the Holy Ghost. The same authority was used again in dealing with Simon Magus.

We reject the suggestion that our Lord pointed to Himself when He said, "Upon This Rock I will build My Church". Such an interpretive gesture would have been recorded as necessary for the true understanding of the promise. Three features stand together in any impartial exegesis of the passage. The first is the *revelation* given to Peter concerning the Messiahship of Jesus. "Blessed art thou, Simon bar-jonah, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 17). Dr. Newton Flew comments: "If the Church is built on Peter in virtue of a revelation given to him, others to whom the same revelation is given may become, like Peter, the foundation of the Church".¹ The second feature is the confession itself. While Protestants may have erred in limiting the interpretation to this one point, they are surely right in emphasizing its importance. The Church is established by its faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah long expected and the very Son of God. This is the source of its life and witness. Without personal allegiance to Christ Jesus and utter confidence in His claims there can be no true discipleship. The third feature is Peter himself. Dr. T. M. Lindsay asserts: "The rock on which the Church was to be built was a *man confessing*—not the man apart from his confession, as the Romanists insist, nor the *confession apart from the man*, as many Protestants argue".² Peter was a seer into divine mysteries. He was also a prophet who was able to utter what he had seen, and he did so as the mouthpiece and representative apostle of the Twelve. A Rabbinic parable offers a parallel. God is likened to a king wishing to build a house, finding no sure foundation, and digging down deep, till at last he found rock. "So when God saw Abraham who was to arise, He said: 'Now I have found a rock on which to build and establish the world'". Peter here in this famous passage is, as it were, the forefather of the New Israel as Abraham was of the old. For this reason Karl Heim is right when he asserts: "It is a strange irony of world history, that just these words of Christ should be displayed in gigantic letters on

¹ *Jesus and His Church*, p. 130.

² *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, p. 6. cp. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 16.

the dome of the Pope's great basilica, which understood in their original sense, exclude and forbid the Papacy in every form, seeing they are practically unique in assigning to the apostle a peerless and absolutely unrepeatable position in God's spiritual temple".¹ Peter, then, was an instrumental foundation for the laying of the chief corner stone. Christ Jesus is the Rock foundation to carry the weight of the building. "For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. iii. 11).

II

Now we must turn our attention to THE BUILDER. Two possessions of Christ are mentioned in this passage, "My Father" and "My Church". Christ rarely spoke of His own possessions. What mattered supremely to Him on earth was "His Father's Business". What He had He gave freely, "His Life, His Peace, His Joy". In the great act of self-emptying Jesus Christ surrendered all but His Father and His Church. Hence "His Flock", "His Brethren," are His personal glory and peculiar treasure. They are His Father's Gift to Him. "Those Whom Thou hast given Me" (John xvii. 6). The Church, then, is Christ's own and He is the Architect and Master-builder. He is sovereign in His own House. There is no other Lord but Him. He is Head of the Ecclesia. This supremacy does not rule out human agents. The actual erection of the building may not be the work of the master-builder himself. He employs labour to assist in the erection. He himself does not engage in menial tasks in the wider interests of the work. "What he does through others, he does himself." "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Psalm cxxxvii. 1).

Because Christ Jesus is the Master Builder the finished product is assured. He will never be guilty of erecting a "folly". He has sat down first and counted the cost (Luke xiv. 28). Ample supplies are to hand to complete the work. There is no danger of bankruptcy in this concern! "He shall bring forth the headstone with shoutings of Grace, Grace, unto it" (Zech iv. 7). Hence the assistants in the work of building need never fear failure. Christ Jesus the Lord is in charge and our duty is to fulfil His plans.

III

Where then are THE BLUE-PRINTS of the building? "On the whole the weightiest and most pregnant body of teaching on the Ecclesia to be found anywhere in the Bible" is in St. John, chapters xiii-xvii.² Three categories are there set forth. (i) The relationship of the Lord Jesus to His own Disciples. This is beautifully expressed in the parable of the True Vine (John xv. 1ff). Canon Dillistone points out that the picture of Israel as a fruitful tree "was altogether congenial to the Hebrew imagination".³ Such passages as Psalm lxxx, Isaiah v, and Hosea xiv set forth the imagery in its varied aspects and applications. Jesus takes this favourite figure and applies it to Himself. He is the True Israel, the planting of Jehovah, and the only faithful

¹ Kittel's *Word Book: The Church*, K. L. Schmidt, p. 44, Note 2.

² Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 223.

³ *The Structure of the Divine Society*, p. 53.

vine in the land. His people are like the branches united to Him and drawing sustenance from Him. By union with Him they feed upon His hidden life and become fruitful in His service. The secret of their life is "abiding in Him". Severed from Him they are lifeless and fit only for burning. How necessary to urge that need for such intimate union with Christ among all who profess to belong to Him. How much dead wood still clings to the visible Church of Christ. Living faith is the connection between the Vine and its branches, and union with Him the means of continuing that life.

(ii) The relationship of the Disciples to one another is revealed in the acted parable of the feetwashing (John xiii. 1ff). This simple menial act of the Master shewed the love of the Saviour for His own. "He loved them to the uttermost" (John xiii. 1, R.V.M.). This type of love was to find expression among them after He was gone. His service to them was the service they were to render to one another. What He stooped to do, though He was their Lord and Master, they were called to do as servants. The humblest service counts more than the occupation of the highest office in Christ's kingdom. When men of the world see the same kind of love at work among the disciples as displayed by Jesus Christ they will recognize us as Christ's own.

(iii) The relationship of the Disciples to the World is seen in two different ways. (a) In the possibilities which faced Judas and Peter. Judas, the covetous, fell prey to the designs of the Evil One and became his tool. There is always the possibility of a fatal alliance between the World and the Church. The Book of Revelation is a standing warning that the Bride of Christ can change her position and become a Harlot. Judas was elected to privilege and forfeited his election by his betrayal.¹ This fate may happen to any body of Christians as well as to an individual when Christ is betrayed. Peter also falls and denies his Lord. His repentance is sealed by the Lord and he is reinstated into the Apostolic Band and re-commissioned (John xxi. 15). His election to salvation is secured by his repentance and willingness to serve. The Church as the body of the Elect must ever bear those two marks of penitence and service upon her. Judas and Peter represent the Church true and false. Here we are in the presence of a mystery. Bishop Lesslie Newbigin has reminded us of this in his memorable Kerr Lectures.² How can a concourse of unholy men still be the ecclesia of God? The Christian is at the same time justified by Divine Grace and yet a sinner. An illustration from the *Life of A. B. Davidson* (p. 297) throws light upon it. With A. B. Grant he was touring the Highlands. They had lunch at a wayside inn. In the same room were two ministers, alike unknown and unknowing; one is exhilarated with whisky and argued loudly about the steps of a certain dance. At last he got up, glass in hand, and went through several antics which he believed to be the steps in question. Dr. Davidson said to his friend: "That kind of thing is a proof of the Divine origin of Christianity. It has had to stand 1,900 years of that, and it is not killed". Christ's

¹ cp. Prayer in Public Baptism of Infants: "grant that this child . . . may ever remain in the number of Thy faithful and elect children". There is the possibility of forfeiting election to privilege.

² *The Household of God*, p. 29.

intention is "to present His Church to Himself not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. v. 27). This recognition of unworthy men in the visible Church has led such notable Christians as St. Augustine and the Reformers to distinguish the two aspects of the Church and to use the epithets "Visible" and "Invisible" to denote the true from the false. While these are not biblical terms they represent what is contained in the Scriptures in other ways. Our Lord is concerned for the purity of His own followers and His heavenly ministry extended to their preservation from the Evil One while dwelling amid the temptations of the world. (b) The Holy Spirit is to dwell within the true disciple and to guide him into all truth (John xvi. 13). He is the Director of Operations in the Church Militant. His presence and power would unite all faithful disciples. Christ prayed for them because of the activity of the Evil One and the seduction of the world "that they might be one, even as we are" (John xvii. 11). This unity may not be visible at all as that between the Father and the Son was not. Advocates of uniformity must remember that when pressing home this verse regardless of its context. "Churchmen are bound," says Sir Wm. Robertson Nicoll, "to prize some things more highly even than the Church's visible unity" (*Life*, p. 385). A false conception of the Church, Ministry and Sacraments would be such a stumbling block. "Sacerdotalism is untrue because it contradicts the whole genius and tenor of the New Testament. If Christ and His Apostles had intended to found a hierarchy of priests, the New Testament, in its affirmations and omissions, would have been altogether unlike the book it is" (p. 373). Yet we must also give full weight to the assertion that inward unity must find a visible expression. It is uncertain whether man can achieve such a unity through conceptions of the Church as "federal" or "covenantal".¹ The Spirit can lead us into unity and without His gracious guiding our schemes and concordats are in vain. The Church is Christ's own and we find our unity in a deeper attachment to Him as He is acknowledged as "the Head of the Body, the Church" (Eph. i. 22). The ultimate goal is "the consummation of all things in Christ" (Eph. i. 10).

Christ's disciples are IN the world, but not OF it (John xvii. 14-15). They are placed there for a special purpose, namely to save a world which is lost in its sin and doomed. The Church is, therefore, a Mediatorial Society, the channel through which the message of Divine Love reaches mankind. "Apart from the society of believers," affirms H. R. Mackintosh, "forgiveness is a mere word without the impulse of personal witness behind it, a word that will not be heard unless there are forgiven men to speak it". We must practise what we preach! "This second requisite is as vital as the first. Without it the Good News can make no impression."²

The Iona Crosses set forth the centrality of forgiveness and its relation to the Church in a beautiful fashion. The uppermost part of the cross, above the circle, takes the form of a house. It is one way of saying that the Church is built on the passion of the Redeemer and is the society of forgiven and forgiving men. Reconciliation is the

¹ See *The Structure of the Divine Society, Section Three.*

² *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, p. 277.

burden of its message and the experience of it the proof of its call and its demonstration of it the fruit of the Spirit. If, as Bishop Newbigin points out, the Church is the "firstfruits and the instrument of that reconciling work of Christ" and yet allows or maintains "divisions within its borders, then it contradicts its own fundamental nature" (p. 18). We cannot be ambassadors to the heathen world of reconciliation through Christ if those who name His Name are not united to one another in the bonds of His great love. The attempt to come together, therefore, becomes urgent and necessary.

IV

THE PURPOSE of the Church is, to adopt a modern phrase, "a dual purpose building". Its primary purpose is to establish the Kingdom of God in the hearts of men. It is not identical with this Kingdom, but the agent for bringing it into being. The use of the keys by Peter indicates its proper sphere. It initiates the Kingly Rule in human lives by declaring the Gospel of Redemption and Regeneration. Too often the two concepts have been identified as one entity. In many ways they overlap each other and yet remain separate entities. The Church is the process, the Kingdom the goal. What Peter was to the beginnings of the Church, so the Church is to the establishment of the Kingdom. We might use the same term, the instrumental foundation of the Kingdom of God. Hence the disciple within the Church still prays, "Thy Kingdom come". Rome has erred in seeking to embody the Kingdom ideal in herself. The Sects have also erred in regarding the Church as a parenthesis of the Divine plan of the Ages and subordinate to the Kingdom. Israel as a nation failed to realize the Kingdom ideal. The New Israel, the Church of God, is committed to the task of extending the Kingly Rule of its Lord over mankind. To forget or to subordinate the missionary message and movement is to deny its title deeds. To this work was the Ecclesia called and to forsake it for other matters is to unchurch itself.

The secondary purpose is to provide a family into which souls born again of the Spirit of God might be nurtured and built up into the "stature of Christ" (Eph. iv. 13). It is always a danger to personify institutions and much harm has been done by the term "Mother Church", but in a very real sense the community of Spirit-filled people is the means of bringing souls to the birth and of feeding them until they are able to fulfil their destiny and high calling in Christ within the fellowship of the Church of God. The importance of the Church to the individual cannot be over stressed in those circles where it has been undervalued for so long. Salvation is both personal and corporate. "God has no blessings for me apart from the rest of the family."

V

The INDWELLING SPIRIT fills the sanctuary of Jehovah which is His People. Without the Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit the Visible Church is a mere shell, a name without a reality. As Bishop Newbigin so emphatically declares "In very truth it is the presence of the Holy Spirit that constitutes the Church" (p. 90). This is the decisive mark of the Church. The Spirit gives it true catholicity,

genuine holiness, spiritual oneness, and delivers it from a spurious apostolicity. Credal orthodoxy and historic succession are vain if the Spirit is absent. He is sovereign in the true Church and moves wheresoever He will. The given structure of Catholicism and the given message of Protestantism are powerless without the Live-giving Spirit.

The New Israel received the mark of its adoption, the seal of inward circumcision, at Pentecost. Each convert, then as now, baptized of the Spirit of God, became a member of the holy nation and part of the church of Christ. The supernatural agent in the re-birth of the soul from its spiritual death is the Life-giving Spirit (Eph. ii. 1ff.). There is nothing doubtful or debatable about this "anointing" of the Spirit (1 John ii. 20, 27; 2 Tim. ii. 19; 2 Cor. i. 21-22). It was common to all in the Apostolic Church and is the blessed experience of all now who belong to the True Church. Is this element of *experience* given its proper place in the discussions about the essential nature of the Church? Even Bishop Wand agrees that the Church must be "dynamic and not static" (p. 29, *The Church*). The Spirit of God supplies that dynamic character to any body of Christians and not correctness of order and formulation of doctrine.

The Ministry is one of the "gifts of the Spirit" (Eph. iv. 7ff.). These gifts are for the equipping of certain men for the work of ministering to the "Body of Christ" (Eph. iv. 11). In this way the Body of Christ, the Church, can fulfil its proper function in the world. In one sense the Church replaces the Christ in the world. Christians are "members of His Body" and He uses them to do His work of saving and healing in the world. In another sense the Spirit is the Vicar of Christ in the world. He came to replace our Lord and to continue the work which Christ Jesus began (Acts i. 8ff.). The danger here is that of regarding "the Body" as an ontological reality and asserting that the Church is Christ. St. Paul does not fall into that error. In the Epistle to the Ephesians he uses the "body" metaphor in two ways (cp. iv. 12 with iv. 15). It is a metaphor and nothing more. By its richness of figure we are introduced to a deep truth as to what we are and what we must become. "The Church is a creature," argues P. T. Forsyth, "Christ is not. That which owes itself to the re-birth cannot be a prolongation of the ever sinless" (*The Church and Sacraments*, p. 83).

"All the ministries," says Dr. Newton Flew, "are based on the principle of the universal ministry of all believers" (p. 238). Throughout the New Testament what is called "the priesthood of all believers" is declared unmistakably. "Christ hath washed from our sins and made us a kingdom of priests unto His Father God" (Rev. i. 6; v. 10). The Church is thus a Sacerdotal Society with the privilege of priestly access into the Holiest of All. The sacrifices are of a spiritual nature, as adoration, self-surrender, praise and thanksgiving (1 Peter ii. 5).

VI

In Christ's promise to Peter the Church is assured of its PERMANENCE, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18). This Aramaic phrase stands for death. Christ's Ecclesia will never die out.

It will never be crushed by the forces of evil. Neither foes without nor traitors within will bring about its decease. This note has received full treatment in the book of Revelation. "The value of the witness of the *Apocalypse* to the Ecclesia," says Dr. Newton Flew, "is more impressive than any other in the canon of the New Testament, and represents the popular views of the first century church" (p. 238). In the messages to the seven churches there is the threat to move the candlestick because of departure from first love (Rev. ii. 5). To each of the churches the call is sounded to be faithful and the promise offered "to him that overcometh" (ii. 7ff.). In the succeeding visions the great host singing the new song represents the victors who overcame. The martyrs emerging from the great tribulation "with robes washed white in the blood of the Lamb" speak in the same triumphant strain of the victory of the church over the Trinity of Evil (Rev. vii. 14). In the sevenfold movement of the book vision after vision is given of these victors, until the climax is reached in the closing chapters when "His servants do Him service and reign for ever and ever" their foes defeated and destroyed (xxii. 3). In days which are becoming more like the scenes pictured in this book this message should encourage us to "hold fast, that no man take our crown" (iii. 11).

VII

The most vivid warning, however, in this wonderful book concerns the PERIL of the Church. K. L. Schmidt has indicated that truth when he points out the struggle within the Christian community in the Early Church over the question of admitting Gentiles without circumcision, and goes on to say that there is always a danger of the ideal Church being destroyed from within its own borders.¹ The Bride of Christ is portrayed in the Revelation as "the holy city", the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (xxi. 2); she is described as "the Lamb's wife" (xxi. 9) and associated with the Spirit in calling men to God (xxii. 17). There can be no doubt of her identity. In contrast to this, in the manner of the book, is set forth the Harlot. She too is described as a city and named as "Babylon, the great" (xvii. 5). The significant thing about her title is the word "Mystery" (xvii. 5). This vision filled the seer with wonder and astonishment (xvii. 6, 7). In contrast to the Bride the harlot is foul and ready for hell (xviii. 8). Old Testament associations help us to identify her.² She is God's unfaithful spouse. It is a mystery that she should depart from the living God and ally herself with the world. "Babylon is the world in the church," says Dr. Wm. Milligan.³ Worldliness unchurches the church. This peril stares Christendom in the face. "Some churches have not the Christ. They are named by His name, but they have thrust Him to the door" (Rev. iii. 20). And St. Peter reminds his readers that "judgment must first begin at the House of God" (1 Peter iv. 17). The Church is always in danger of destroying her true character by

¹ p. 20, *Bible Key Words: The Church*.

² Cp. Hosea i. 2, ii. 2; Isaiah i. 21; Ezekiel xvi. 2 and 35; Jeremiah iii. 1.

³ *Expositor's Bible*, p. 296.

departing from the Apostolic message or by an alliance with the world. In some measure all communions have fallen prey to the peril.

The Church is not what it ought to be. When every section of Christendom approaches "Church Relations" in this penitent spirit and is willing to return to the Lord Himself as the centre of Life and Truth and Power, then the movement will have begun toward better understanding of "the pattern in the mount" which must be realized here below.

In the New Testament the Church is both actual and ideal. There is a double element. "We are and yet we await the Church." This expectation is enshrined in the Creed, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church". It is in being and yet it has not yet become an object of sight. Our whole task as Christians is to become what we are.

Nonconformity and Reunion

BY THE REV. E. C. DEWICK, M.A., D.D.

I. The Reunion Movement in the Twentieth Century

THIRTY-FIVE years ago, I was in the City of Oxford, attending the first Mansfield College Conference of Anglicans and Free Churchmen on the subject of the Reunion of Christendom. The Reunion Movement had been growing in strength during the first two decades of this century; and it reached its peak about that time, when the two Mansfield Conferences were held, and the Appeal to All Christian People was issued from the Lambeth Conference of 1920.

The two Mansfield Conferences both passed similar resolutions, urging that (as a means to *promote* Reunion, and not only *after* Reunion had been consummated), "Interchange of Pulpits," and "mutual admission to the Lord's Table", should be sanctioned between the Churches represented at the Conference, which included Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregationalist, and Baptist. At the first Conference, the Anglicans were mostly of the Evangelical school; at the second Conference, the signatories included outstanding leaders of other schools of thought, such as William Temple, Oliver Quick, Charles Raven, Dick Sheppard; and even liberal Anglo-Catholics, such as Canons Lacey and Percy Dearmer.¹

These resolutions, endorsed by such weighty signatures, aroused widespread hopes that the Church of England was about to enter into a fellowship with the Free Churches in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, similar to that which the majority of the Free Churches have always practised among themselves.

These hopes were further encouraged by the Appeal to All Christian People by the Anglican Episcopate, also published in 1920. The stirring words of the Appeal, with its noble vision of a great united Church, and its call to "an adventure of goodwill, and still more, of faith",² struck a new note in inter-Church relationships, and touched

¹ See *S.P.C.K. Documents, 1916-1920*, pp. 77-86.

² *Lambeth (1920) Report*, pp. 26-28.