

# CAN YOU LOVE JESUS AND NOT LOVE THE CHURCH?

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Executive Summary .....	4
Introduction .....	5
The Theology of the Church.....	6
What is the church?.....	6
The Church as the people of God .....	6
The Church as a Community.....	7
The Church as a servant people.....	7
What is the purpose of the church? .....	8
Summary.....	9
Historical Development of the Early Church.....	10
Introduction .....	10
The New Testament Church & Church Leadership.....	10
The Early Church - the synagogue model .....	11
Summary.....	12
The Church and Consumerism.....	12
Deconstruction .....	14
Final Reflection .....	15
Appendix A: Ecclesiological Developments in Church History.....	17
Introduction .....	17
1st to 3rd Century Form .....	17
4th to 16th Century .....	18
The Great Schism (separation of Eastern Orthodox Church).....	18
The Middle Ages .....	19
16th Century to Present .....	19
Martin Luther.....	20
Resulting Reformation.....	20
The Presbyterians .....	20
The Anabaptists .....	21
Puritans & Pietists.....	21
The Methodists.....	22
Brethren & Pentecostals.....	22
Key Elements of Pentecostal / Charismatic Ecclesiology.....	22
Appendix B: New Testament Nomenclature .....	24
Appendix C: The Cultural Forms of the Church & Church Leadership .....	25
Bibliography.....	28
Books .....	28

Websites..... 28

## Executive Summary

This paper considers the theology of gathering. This is against the backdrop of the fall off of church attendance experienced by nearly all denominations following the lockdowns of the last few years. It also considers the challenges of living in a post-covid world as churches, particularly where a hybrid of in person and on-line church is continuing.

Beginning with the theology of the church, this paper considers the purpose of the church as the community of God's people and as the agent of the kingdom of God. In both of these modes, the gathering of God's people is essential in order to fulfil the purpose for which the church was brought into existence. The mission of the church flows out of the church as a gathered entity.

From its beginnings the church has existed in gatherings of people in a local setting who exist as a counter-cultural community tasked with demonstrating the love of God and with communicating the salvation of God to the world. This existence is often in conflict with the surrounding culture in which the church finds itself. The paper maps the early church form and structure to demonstrate how this simple model of church existed from its earliest days.

Following a consideration of the beginnings of the church, the challenges of the culture in which we now find ourselves as churches are reflected upon. Specifically, the issues that consumerism and deconstruction present are briefly analysed, as these are two issues that have been exacerbated by the recent crisis.

Finally, there is a reflection on what all this means for us as churches and how we can counter some of these things within our own context as church leaders.

## Introduction

In this paper, we will consider the notion of gathering as church in all its forms. This is set against the backdrop of the pandemic where churches were not allowed to gather and resorted to alternative forms of interaction: broadcasting via YouTube and Facebook, Zoom meetings, WhatsApp groups, etc. Such alternative forms of 'church' enabled a number of behaviours amongst congregants. For many, church became a matter of passive rather than active engagement. Others disconnected from church in every form altogether. Still others took the opportunity to serve and became more active than ever in areas such as technical facilitation or contributing video material to broadcasts. Some became consumers and, instead of being committed to one local body, chose to which church they would connect from the global array of online offerings available.

All of this has had serious consequences for many churches as we have come out of the pandemic. The following is a list of challenges and questions that many churches face:

How do we deal pastorally with people who only connect online?

How do we reconnect with people who have 'disappeared' through the back door as a result of this crisis?

What does this say about us seeing church as a building?

What is a local congregation in the new world?

What is our response to the consumerism that we have observed (i.e., people selecting which online service they will connect to)?

Do we need to continue our online activities as we regather?

Are online services seen as a 'gathering' or simply as a broadcast? What are the implications of this?

Are online services a missional activity or actually the church in a different format? Are they both? Are they a stepping stone to church?

Does online church lead to greater inclusivity or greater marketisation of relationships?

How sustainable and desirable is hybrid church given limited leadership resources?

What actually is an authentic Christian life in the new hybrid world?

How does this work out with regard to sacraments, relationships, mission, discipleship, etc.?

Whilst it will be impossible to answer all of these questions in this short paper, they are certainly worthy of further consideration as we seek to move forward as churches and as a network.

In this paper, we will consider the theology of the church. We will then study the early church praxis. (How the institutionalization of the church arose, as well as the reform movements that have brought us to our present situation is considered in Appendix A.). In addition, we will examine alternative points of view, in particular, consumerism and deconstruction, concluding with a brief reflection on why gathering is important.

## The Theology of the Church

### What is the church?

The Church is the 'living community of those who have responded to the call of God'.<sup>1</sup> Isidore of Pelusium defined the church as 'the assembly of saints joined together by correct faith and excellent manner of life'.<sup>2</sup> It is a community of faith united without reference to colour, age, or gender. There is one holy, catholic and apostolic church.<sup>3</sup>

The Greek word for church is *ekklesia*. This literally means 'called out ones'. It was used of a city council or of an assembly for purpose. It is also used in the Septuagint to describe Moses' assembly in the wilderness, which contrasts with Jesus' assembly of the New Covenant. The people of Israel were 'called out' of Egypt; in the same way the Church is 'called out' of the world (Eph. 2:11-22, Eph. 3: 1-10) to be a single nation under Christ Jesus. As Tom Wright suggests in great detail, the church is the people of God reconstituted around Jesus the Messiah.<sup>4</sup> As such, the church has a mission and that mission is to fill the earth with the glory of God.

This has three aspects to it. Firstly, we can see the church as the great procession of saints – all who have truly believed from Pentecost and will continue until the Second Coming (Hebrews 12:1). Secondly, we can consider the visible / invisible church: the visible is made up of everyone who attends; the invisible church is everyone who believes whether or not they attend. This will only be fully revealed in the Eschaton. The question concerning whether you can be a Christian and not be part of the body will be considered later on. Thirdly, we could speak in terms of the global or the local Church: the global Church is everyone in the world at a given point in time who is a Christian (1 Cor. 10:32, Gal. 1:13); the local church is an expression of the global church within a defined location. Note, the New Testament knows nothing of denominationalism but only of the church in the locality. Each local church should be a microcosm of the Kingdom, reflecting the heart of God, telling of the salvation of God, demonstrating the life of God, enacting the rulership of God

### The Church as the people of God

Israel was established as God's people as a result of the Abrahamic Covenant, confirmed by the Mosaic Covenant. The significance of the cross and the resurrection is that the People of God are no longer simply those tracing ethnic descent from Abraham with circumcision as the sign, but those who, by faith, have accepted Israel's Messiah as saviour, with the covenant sign of baptism. Thus, the people of God are now reconstituted around Jesus (Romans 4:1-16, Galatians 3:6-18, 1 Peter 2:9).

The Church is not essentially an institution although it is bound to have some institutional elements (e.g., time of meeting, place of meeting, structure of leadership, etc.)<sup>5</sup>. Rather, the Church is the Charismatic Community of God's people. Again, this has three aspects to it: people, community and charismatic.

Firstly, people (Gk. *laos*). We are only the Church when we are a plurality. I am not the church; we are the Church. Splendid isolation is not part of God's plan for his people. This comes back to not seeing the church as somewhere for me to go and get blessed but being part of a people with a common heritage and destiny, and a high calling.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Milne *Know the Truth* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1982)

<sup>2</sup> Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction 4<sup>th</sup> Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p.393

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.408-417

<sup>4</sup> N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God: Part III* (London: SPCK, 2013), Ch.10

<sup>5</sup> Howard Snyder, *The Community of the King*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), p.63-66

Secondly, community (Gk. *koinonia* – lit. ‘common sharing’). This implies total commitment to one another, as in Acts 2 and Acts 4. It is not a once-a-week experience, but a life lived in relationship. The church we see in Acts shared their lives, and their food, they supported the needy, healed the sick. Their life together was more than just filling a chair on a Sunday morning or even a mid-week gathering. It was the depth and quality of their life together that was so attractive and was the basis of their missional power (Acts 4:32-35).

Thirdly, charismatic (Gk. *Charismata* – ‘gifts of grace’). Born out of the grace gift of salvation and energised through the *pneumatika* of the Holy Spirit, and the ministries of Ephesians 4 which are the gifts (Gk. *doma*) of Christ to His Church. This is the method by which the body grows, and the Kingdom is thus extended. The *pneumatika* and the *doma* can only function where there is a gathered body of believers. The church is the context through which the work of the Spirit is actualised.

The ground for our membership of the Church is the same as for becoming a Christian: repentance, faith, baptism in water and the receipt of the Holy Spirit. In other words, our entry into the community of God’s people begins when we are born again. Thus, church is not an optional extra but is rather at the very heart of the purposes of God in salvation. We are saved in order to fulfil the purposes of God in the earth which rest in community as we will now consider.

#### The Church as a Community

As a Puritan once wrote, ‘God in Himself is a sweet society’<sup>6</sup>. God’s purposes have always centred in communities and it is as we relate together that we reflect the corporeity of the trinity and reveal His glory on earth.

God established three communities throughout history. Firstly, the Eden Community (Genesis 2:18) established with the mandate to rule and steward the earth on God’s behalf (Genesis 1:28-29). Secondly, the Abrahamic / Mosaic Community established to be a physical demonstration in the earth of kingdom living – one nation under God in theocratic order so that they could bring God’s light to the nations (Isaiah 51:4, 60:3). Thirdly, the Community of the King (the Church in all of the above aspects). We have the mandate of both the previous two communities without the boundaries of political or physical limitation and with the redemptive power of the cross as our unifying factor.

We are also constituted as a witnessing community. We are called to make known the truth of the gospel in every way (we are to be both salt and light – Matthew 5:13-16). In addition, we are a community of the Spirit. It was on the day of Pentecost that the church was launched and it is the Spirit who energises and sustains the church.

#### The Church as a servant people

God chose and called Israel to serve him. In the same way, God chose and called the church for service. Leadership in the church is summed up in two words in the New Testament: *doulos* and *diakonos*. The first means ‘servant’ (or literally slave); the second means ‘table waiter’.

Paul calls himself a slave, for example, in Romans 1:1 and 2 Corinthians 4:5. This is the position Jesus himself told us to take up and gave us an example to follow in John 13:1-17.

The word for table waiter is transliterated in most translations of the Bible as ‘deacon’, but sometimes it is also translated ‘minister’, depending on the circumstances (Acts 6:2, c.f. 6:4). Thus,

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<sup>6</sup> I am not sure who originally said this, but I heard it quoted by Ern Baxter at the Anglia Bible Week in 1982

all 'ministry' is simply waiting on tables. In this sense, we are all servants and should follow the example of the master in serving one another. This should typify the church of Jesus Christ.

What is the purpose of the church?

At the beginning, God declared that his creation was *very good*. From the fall he set in place his plan to redeem and restore his creation to its original goodness. God called Abraham so that, through him and his seed, 'all the nations of the earth would be blessed' (Genesis 12:3). This promise to Abraham meant that the people of Israel were to be the 'light to the nations' (Isaiah 51:4, 60:3). Unfortunately, through their rebellion, they suffered the same fate as Adam – exile. However, God's faithfulness to the covenant meant that he would not give up on his rescue plan for the world.

That plan was focussed on one man – man of very man; God of very God; the seed of Abraham through whom all the nations would indeed be blessed. On the cross, he suffered the full brokenness of creation so that he might become the source of its repair. In his resurrection, he gave the guarantee of the resurrection, not just of humanity, but of all creation. In his exaltation, *he now reigns until his enemies are made a footstool* (Hebrews 10:13).

*For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him. But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of His suffering death crowned with glory and honour, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone.* (Hebrews 2:8-9).

When Jesus returns, it will be as Lord of all creation. He will deal with his enemies and all that opposes the great work of salvation and restoration. We will be alongside him in resurrected bodies. The *kosmos* will submit fully to his just and righteous reign and all things will return to the harmony that was within creation at the beginning (Romans 8:18-22).

Presently, we live in the now / not yet of the kingdom of God. We have come under his reign but have not yet been fully restored. In the same way, the world is under the reign of Christ but not yet fully restored. Also, Jesus has taken back the mandate that was given to Adam in the first place to rule on behalf of humanity (see Romans 5:18-21). He has recapitulated the divine intention and succeeded where Adam failed. His righteous reign is working its way through the earth, 'bringing many sons to glory' (Hebrews 2:10), until the work of restoration is complete.

The church has been established by Jesus Christ to be the agent of the kingdom of God on earth. As agents of the kingdom, we are called to work alongside him in his restoring work. This begins with bringing people back under his authority through the word of salvation, but it also includes picking up again the divine mandate to steward the earth and to care for creation so that, in all ways, it may once more display the glory, wisdom and love of God. Incorporated within stewardship is bringing justice to the poor and fulfilling the Isaiah 61 kingdom mandate (as affirmed by Jesus in Luke 4:16-21).

This work has been defined in the Five Marks of Mission as follows:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation



5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth<sup>7</sup>

The church can only function and fulfil its purpose as people come together and partner with God in the work of transforming the *Kosmos*.

The church is God's governmental assembly on earth (see *ekklesia* above). Under the Old Covenant, Israel was chosen to be a theocratic nation under God. The mystery (*mysterion*: 'open secret') is that under the New Covenant, God's purposes do not rest solely in Israel, but that he has brought the nations of the gentiles into His covenant promises so that the Church is now the theocratic nation under God made up of Jews and gentiles. That is the essence of Ephesians 3:1-10. The reconciliation that has come through Christ has made this possible. We (gentiles) are no longer far off, but have been brought near (Eph. 2: 17), and we have been so to be a demonstration to the principalities and powers of the many-coloured wisdom of God (Eph. 3:10).

We have been brought under His authority so that we can demonstrate and exercise His authority on earth. We have been brought into a kingdom in which there is order and responsibility and accountability and all this emanates directly from the throne of God.

The earth is the arena of the universe, the homeland of creatures that bear His name. He is working out His purposes here so that the life of Heaven can be seen on earth by the principalities and powers until Heaven and Earth are one under the Headship of Christ.

The Church is God's Plan A in his purposes to reconcile the world to himself, and restore it to the original divine intention. We have the responsibility of mediating the complete work of Christ to the Universe. Thus, the role of the Church is summed up in the following five statements:

1. To be the agent of the Kingdom. 'To the extent that the Church grows and expands throughout the world and demonstrates true Christian community, to that extent the kingdom of God has come on Earth'.<sup>8</sup>
2. To be the expression and ministry of Christ to the World (Isaiah 61:1-2).
3. To be the means of reconciliation (Ephesians 2:11-22, 2 Corinthians 5:18-19).
4. To be the mediator of God's '*diasozo*' (salvation in all its forms).
5. To be the agents of purification and revelation (salt and light – social action / justice and evangelism) to the world.

### Summary

Individuals are not born again to sit in isolation with their ticket in their hand waiting to get to heaven. Christian faith is not a solo ride. Instead, when we come to faith and are baptised, we are inducted into the 'Holy Nation' (1 Peter 2:9) with a common purpose with the rest of God's people to see the kingdom of God come on earth just as it is in heaven. Unless we realise this, we miss out on our vocation as human beings and as born-again members of the household of God. Our destiny is not to be on our own but to be part of God's continuing purpose in the earth until all things are restored to the original intention and God's glory fills the earth.

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<sup>7</sup> *The Five Marks of Mission* < <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2017-11/MTAG%20The%205%20Marks%20Of%20Mission.pdf> > [Accessed: 03/02/2022]

<sup>8</sup> Snyder, *Community*, p.69

## Historical Development of the Early Church

### Introduction

Whenever we approach any study on Ecclesiology, we are dependent, not only on what is written in the pages of the Bible, but also on what has been passed down to us through tradition and church history. It also requires an element of cultural and contextual study as the form the church has taken over the last two millennia has varied as a result of:

- Tradition – inherited church practice
- Theological understanding – interpretation of what the Bible says
- Cultural norms and influences – the form the church will take in a given culture and what will influence that form (e.g., attitude towards older people, younger people, other religions, persecution, etc.)
- The character of the leader – a good leader leads out of their personality. This will influence the character and shape of the church he/she leads. If he/she is the leader of a movement or denomination, that also will take on elements of his/her style and practice.

In this section, we will consider the historical development of the early church and its leadership structures. We will then look at the New Testament guidelines regarding leadership. Finally, we will consider the cultural context in which we find ourselves and seek to identify what form the church should take within that context.

The reason for the following consideration concerning leadership structures is that, in its essence, the people of God are a community. All communities have some form of governance which gives them cohesion and order. This brief consideration is included to provide an insight into the way in which the early church community structured itself in order to achieve the purpose for which the church had been established.

### The New Testament Church & Church Leadership

As we read through the pages of the New Testament, and especially the book of Acts, we encounter a church that is vibrant, dynamic and organic. We also see one that is fluid – there is no fixed hierarchy and even local church leadership varies.

Leadership structures in the church began very simply from the launch of the Church on the day of Pentecost. As the church was primarily in one place – Jerusalem – it was obvious to all that the Apostles – the ones chosen by Jesus himself – should lead (see Acts 1:15-26: the replacement of Judas amongst the 12). From the end of Acts 2 (42-47), we see that this leadership focussed around teaching, fellowship, eucharist and prayer. These remain the four key areas of leadership.

Of course, within a short time, the job of managing all the practical details of a growing church became too much for the Apostles, so they appointed deacons to assist with the task (Acts 6). How far the role of deacons extended beyond feeding the poor widows is unclear. It seems apparent, however, that by the time we reach the first letter to Timothy (circa A.D. 65) the roles of elders (*episkopos* (bishop = ‘watcher’, ‘overseer’ – 1 Tim 3:1ff.), and *Presbuteros* (lit. ‘ambassador’, usually translated ‘elder’ - 1 Tim 4:14, 5:17, 1 Pet 5:1)) and deacons were beginning to be defined (See Appendix B: New Testament Nomenclature).

In the beginning, of course, the church existed in one location: Jerusalem, but it was as the church began to expand out of Jerusalem that the issue of the leadership of the ‘satellite’ churches began to

arise. What seems to have happened is that the synagogue model became the basis of the early church ecclesiology.

### The Early Church - the synagogue model

The synagogue as a permanent institution was developed in Babylon when the people of Israel were in captivity. Its purpose was to provide an environment where the people of God could come together to hear the Torah read, to listen to the word explained by a teacher, to discuss and debate its meaning, and to pray. Not only that, it became the centre of the community such that the elders of the synagogue were also the leaders within the local community tasked with ensuring community coherence and managing community life. The synagogue became the centre of the community and helped to sustain Jewish life from the time of the Diaspora until the present. On the return from captivity, this format continued alongside the re-establishment of the temple by Zerubbabel. Thus, for Jesus, and for the disciples, attendance at the synagogue was an integral part of their upbringing.

With the birth of the church, following the events of Acts 2, it was natural that the members of the early church would have continued to go to the synagogue (and the Temple, see Acts 2:46) as they still saw themselves as Jews who had simply recognised their Messiah. The synagogue was an environment to debate such things, and this is exactly what they did. The first hint of trouble in this respect is found in Acts 6:9 when the members of one of the Jerusalem synagogues (there were in the region of 480 of them<sup>9</sup>), took exception to Stephen's debating and had him stoned.

Throughout the rest of the Book of Acts, we see Paul attending the synagogue in each town he visited, debating with the Jews, and then taking with him those who believed his message and setting up a rival 'synagogue' either in a home or in a public meeting place (see, for example, Acts 19:9 – the lecture hall of Tyrannus).

From the beginning, religious and political authority was intimately connected in Jewish life, and communal leadership assumed two overlapping but distinct forms. On the one hand were religious judges or rabbis whose expertise in Torah gave them special authority. On the other hand, communal control over non-halakhic (not directed by the Torah) public affairs devolved upon the 'elders' whose authority derived from their age, wealth, family lineage, gender, and personal qualities.<sup>10</sup>

By Acts 15, the Jerusalem church had also taken on this form of leadership. We see James as the elder running the church, whilst the Apostles had become trans-local in their ministry. To sort out the debate in Acts 15, 'the apostles and elders came together' (Acts 15:6), but it was James who made the final judgement (15:13ff). Thus, elders exercised rulership in the local assembly of believers.

When Paul, and others established churches, they seem to have carried this same format over into the leadership of the local church, establishing elders, who were responsible for the organisational and doctrinal aspects of the church, deacons, who were responsible for the practical aspects of the church (such as feeding the poor), as well as recognising the fivefold functional ministries of Ephesians 4 who were designated according to their gifting (*dōma*). Some of these ministries (i.e., apostle, prophet and evangelist) were also trans-local. By this time, the church had migrated from the synagogue into homes and so the leaders were in a very real sense also the hosts of the congregation – leaders of a small community of God's people.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14160-synagogue>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.jewishrecon.org/resource/synagogue-governance-sacred-trust>

It seems that some of the charismatically designated Ephesians 4 ministries operated locally as elders, and thus combined the role of elder and minister (servant). In fact, in 1 Timothy 3:2, Paul identifies one of the core gifts of an elder as being 'able to teach', although most of the other qualifications concern an elder's ability to manage himself / herself and their household, and, therefore, the church of Jesus Christ. It is good character more than anything else that defines an elder. The Didache lays out some guidelines for the relationship between the local church and the trans-local ministries which include how long a trans-local minister should be allowed to stay in a local setting.<sup>11</sup>

### Summary

Early Church leadership was flexible and fluid. Local governance was carried out by elders (*Presbuteros / Episkopos*) and deacons (*Diakonoi*) appointed by the Apostles who were, in many cases, the hosts of the houses in which the early churches met. They were designated according to their character and standing within the church community, as well as their knowledge of apostolic teaching. They may also have operated in one of the charismatically designated ministry gifts of Ephesians 4, although some of these were also trans-local.

The Church was kept as a cohesive whole through the ministry of the Apostles who moved between congregations in order to encourage, bless, challenge and bring order when things were unravelling.

In the New Testament, there is no concept of coming to faith and not being part of the community. The church was structured in such a way as to keep the community of God's people aligned with its purpose and in good order. It was the primary means of discipleship so that the health of individuals within the community was assured. The only suggestion of congregants not understanding this is in Hebrews 10:24-25:

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

The writer to the Hebrews cites gathering as an essential part of ensuring that the church fulfils its mission in the light of Christ's imminent return. This instruction is given in the context of persecution where some people had ceased to assemble in order to conceal their identity as Christians. Regardless of this backdrop, the writer emphasises the importance of gathering.

Appendix A describes the development of ecclesiology over the centuries, following the death of the Apostles, to the present day. Appendix C considers the cultural context in which local churches operate. Whilst both of these discussions are relevant to a wider discussion regarding ecclesiology, they are less relevant when considering the nature of the church and the importance of gathering.

### The Church and Consumerism

In 1987, Barbara Kruger in an iconic artwork coined the phrase, 'I shop therefore I am', based on Rene Descartes famous quotation, 'I think therefore I am'. In other words, self-actualisation is rooted in the individual's ability to make consumer choices. These become an expression of the individual that constitutes part of their identity. Thus, who I am is no longer a function of the community in which I live (as it was for thousands of years), but rather it is a function of my ability to fulfil my perceived wants and needs.

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<sup>11</sup> *The Didache*, < <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0714.htm> > Chapter 11 [Accessed: 03/02/2022]

This consumerism is a characteristic of developed cultures (particularly, but not exclusively, in the West). Those in the developing nations operate on the lowest rung of Maslow's triangle (fulfilling physiological and safety needs). However, this consumerism has leaked into every aspect of life in developed nations as people are no longer concerned with subsistence but rather with satisfaction and personal fulfilment. This creates a society which is self-centred and operates on a level where transactions (physical, emotional and spiritual) are only of value if they affirm who I am. If something gives me pleasure, it is good; if something gives me pain, it is bad. This is regardless of any other implications of such transactions, moral or otherwise.

In his book *The Divine Commodity*, Skye Jethani identifies that the church has been strongly influenced by the consumerism of the world.<sup>12</sup> He asks the question, 'Has the contemporary church been so captivated by the images and methods of the consumer culture that it has forfeited its sacred vocation to be a countercultural agent of God's kingdom in the world? And if it has, what are we to do about it?'<sup>13</sup> In the remainder of the book, he seeks to analyse this suggestion and proposes how we can recapture the divine intention.

Since the Reformation, the church has so emphasised individual salvation that the notion of corporate purpose has been reduced to helping people to get to heaven. Rather than individuals seeing themselves as agents of the kingdom with a corporate responsibility for the *kosmos*, salvation has been framed around giving people a 'bus ticket' to escape this world. Once they have their ticket, they then have the option of connecting with the people of God or otherwise. Such consumer Christianity has led to a church where individuals can not only choose whether they attend church or not, but also, which church they will connect with based on style, age, socio-economic fit, etc. When illustrating this concerning a particular couple who left his church for a bigger one, Skye Jethani suggested that 'Choice trumped commitment. Comfort trumped community'.<sup>14</sup>

The pandemic has accelerated this tendency in that people who were previously committed to church suddenly realised that they had a choice. They could still consume a spiritual experience from home without the discomfort of relationships. They could view the offering of whichever church they liked without even having to get dressed in the morning. For many, these benefits far outweigh the paybacks of regathering.

The real problem of this consumerism is that it is rooted in a distorted view of the purpose of the church and the purpose of salvation. As we have laid out above, the church is not in existence to satisfy the perceived needs of individuals, but to partner with God in bringing the kingdom of God to earth in all its forms. Whilst individuals can play a small part in that purpose, it cannot be fully realised except in community, and it can only be seen at a local level as communities of God's people live and work in harmony with each other to change the world in which they live. Such consumerism completely lacks the missional and vocational dimensions of the church.

A cursory consideration of the New Testament will highlight the corporate nature of salvation. Each of the metaphors of the church (the bride, the body of Christ, the temple, the army, etc.) are meaningless without the relational aspect of salvation. Any person who is serious about pursuing their faith and who considers these metaphors cannot but see that our existence as Christians in this

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<sup>12</sup> Skye Jethani, *The Divine Commodity: Discovering A Faith Beyond Consumer Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. p.11

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p.127

world is dependent on our being together. My destiny cannot be realised unless I am working it out in relationship with brothers and sisters in Christ.

## Deconstruction

In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche announces that 'All things that live long are gradually so saturated with reason that their origin in unreason thereby becomes improbable. Does not almost every precise history of an origination impress our feelings as paradoxical and wantonly offensive? Does the good historian not, at bottom, constantly contradict?'.<sup>15</sup>

This is the basis on which Derrida formulated his ideas of deconstructionism. Essentially, deconstructionism sets out to question the reality and validity of everything we perceive, including language, thought, and knowledge. This includes inherited societal structures.

When it comes to the church, those who advocate deconstructionism suggest that all inherited ecclesiology should be questioned, whether that be New Testament forms, or those inherited from church history. Thus, leadership structures and even the principle of gathering have been under attack as those who advocate deconstructionism seek to find new forms of church which are culturally relevant in a postmodern setting.

One of the tenets of postmodernism is that, for something to be real, it must be real for me. To quote the title of the book by J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, '*Truth is stranger than it used to be*'.<sup>16</sup> Truth is only truth as it is perceived by the individual and my truth may not be your truth. This undermines the whole basis of doctrinal belief and enables any participant within a culture or sub-culture to create a form of reality that works for them.

When applied to the church, we find that everything is up for debate and all ways of being church are questioned. No longer is the church the custodian of the truth or of faith. Instead, the faith journey is whatever I want it to be. That may mean that I can connect with the church (or a specific church) or it may mean that my faith journey is more real if I embark on it on my own. Any theory or theology of church that contradicts this is therefore suspect as it prevents me from actualising my own faith.

The result of this is that church becomes what I want it to be. It may be a coffee with another believer; it may be a meditation on a book or Bible passage with a friend; it may simply be sitting at home and watching someone else's service. Whatever works for me is all that is important.

Obviously, this approach to faith stands in contradiction with both the theology of the church and the history of the church as a gathering of God's people for purpose, whether in small groups, or in larger groups. However, are there some benefits to this approach?

Certainly, if the reformers had not taken a more flexible approach in seeking to re-establish Biblical models of church, we would still be languishing under episcopal structures. But how far should we / can we go when seeking to establish a form of church within a particular cultural and psychological context. Is the New Testament model just one model from which we can draw or should it be the norm for our gathering? In a post-pandemic world, is a hybrid model that allows people to engage at

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<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche; Clark, Maudemarie; Leiter, Brian; Hollingdale, R.J. *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997). pp. 8–9

<sup>16</sup> J. Richard Middleton & Brian J. Walsh *Truth is Stranger than it used to be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1995)

the level they wish to a more appropriate form of church? Is a gathered model the only valid form of church or should a more dispersed model be the order of the day?

Of course, cultural considerations need to be taken into account when thinking about structures and operations of a particular church. Certainly, a church should look and feel different in England compared to a similar church in India, for example. However, the basis of our faith and praxis is the Bible (and especially the New Testament). The challenge is in taking the principles of church (as laid out above) that we find in the New Testament and applying them in our own context. What we do not have the option of is throwing out such principles in order to align with our culture or with the prevailing philosophy. If the Word of God is the Word of God, it is so for all times and in all contexts and we ignore it at our peril. Thus, the trend towards deconstruction must be tempered by the principles of scripture that we find concerning the church as a community of God's people called together for purpose. The tendency towards self-actualisation at the expense of community is totally contrary to the purposes of God for both the individual and the church.

### Final Reflection

It is clear from our brief theological consideration of what church actually is, that the essence of church is community. We see this reflected in both the New Testament and in the history of the early church. This essential element of community is not an end in itself but rather is a gathering of people for a corporate purpose which has to do with bringing in the kingdom of God. That purpose is at an individual level (I need the Kingdom of God to shape my own life) and at a corporate level where we see the Kingdom being expressed as good news to all who need to hear it, where it challenges injustice in society, and where it prepares the world for the coming of the king.

Anything that defines itself as church must have this corporate element within it and that can only be facilitated through gathering. If we exclude ourselves from the church, we also exclude ourselves from the greater purposes of God for his world.

In the final analysis, you cannot be a fully functioning Christian and not be part of the church because you are born again and baptised into the body of Christ. Anything short of participation in the church is tantamount to rejecting the body of Christ and invalidating the sacrament of Eucharist.

The question this paper seeks to answer is can you love Jesus and not love the church. Of course, some have been hurt and damaged by their experience of church and this has coloured their view of the church. However, for a person to realise in full their vocation and destiny, it has to be within the context of the community of God's people with all the challenges that presents.

Returning to our introduction, I believe this paper begs further consideration of the questions raised. The following is a list of some of the more crucial ones with some commentary included. I have also combined some of the questions where appropriate.

How do we deal pastorally with people who only connect online? This question is aimed at the real-life situation we find ourselves in regardless of our theology of church. Some thoughts around what pastoral care actually looks like in the new world and how it can be administered may be a fruitful area to pursue.

How do we reconnect with people who have 'disappeared' through the back door as a result of this crisis? This issue has been exacerbated by the recent crisis but has always been a challenge of church leadership. Perhaps some work on restoring the prodigals is appropriate here.

What is a local congregation in the new world? Are online services a missional activity or actually the church in a different format? Are they both? Are they a stepping stone to church? This raises

questions concerning who we actually see as community members and who we really have responsibility for pastorally. In addition, is the question of who we see as our mission field.

What is our response to the consumerism that we have observed? Does online church lead to greater inclusivity or greater marketisation of relationships? There is a deeper issue here which has been explored to some degree above, but it concerns how we inculcate a deeper sense of belonging to a local body amongst our congregation.

How sustainable and desirable is hybrid church given limited leadership resources? I think this is a question that can only be answered at a local level. My observation is that there are a lot of tired leaders in the wider world who have been seeking to sustain both without additional resources.

What actually is an authentic Christian life in the new hybrid world? How does this work out with regard to sacraments, relationships, mission, discipleship, etc.? Again, this question goes to the depths of what we see as true discipleship and what is the goal of that discipleship. Perhaps previous answers to that question will no longer prove adequate in the new world. Also, though we are non-sacramental in theory (and that is another topic worthy of further consideration) the question remains as to how we can administer the sacraments of baptism and eucharist authentically in the new world.

All of these questions could be a paper in their own right, and time and space do not allow us to explore them further here. As I see it, the challenge for the churches within Ground Level is whether they will continue to bumble along under their own steam seeking to address these questions (voiced or otherwise) or whether we can provide resources and advice that might help others to wrestle with these things and come up with solutions that fit their geographic and cultural context.



## Appendix A: Ecclesiological Developments in Church History

### Introduction

Following the First Century and during the next fourteen hundred years of church history, we see an increasing hierarchy in the structure of the church and a centralisation of power. We also see the fragmentation of the Universal (catholic) Church. As we hit the 16th Century and the Reformation, we see a new openness to experiment with other forms of church government as scriptural truth is recovered. This results in a recapturing of New Testament models by the time we reach the Twentieth Century. We will follow this course of events over the next sessions.

### 1st to 3rd Century Form

By the end of the 1st Century, as the Apostles began to die out, churches began to look for leadership and oversight from those *episkopoi* (bishops) in the bigger churches located in the bigger cities of the Empire. Thus, in the writings of Clement, Bishop of Rome, who sat under the ministry of the Apostles, and who wrote many letters between AD96 and 155 (including one lengthy one to the Corinthians), we start to see a distinction between the role of bishop and elder, with the bishops overseeing the churches in an area and the elders overseeing a single congregation.

The letter addressed to Corinth by Clement deals with a situation in which the young men, not content with their leadership, had revolted and established their own leadership. Clement appeals to them on the basis that their previous leaders had been appointed by the Apostles and thus seems to reinforce apostolic succession as a way of guaranteeing consistency of teaching and ministry.

At a similar time, Ignatius (Bishop of Antioch and martyr under Trajan), affirmed the bishop as being the one person in a Christian community responsible for handing on the faith and guarding against deviation. The bishop, after all, presided at the Eucharist and was the automatic source of authority: 'You must follow the bishop as Jesus Christ [followed] the Father...Let no one do anything apart from the bishop that has to do with the church. Let that be regarded as a valid Eucharist which is held under the bishop or to whomever he entrusts it. Wherever the bishop appears, there let the congregation be; just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the whole church.'<sup>17</sup> Thus, we have an early move towards the centralisation of power into the hands of the bishops.

In addition, according to these and other writings of the time by men such as Ignatius (see also the Didache), there remained trans-local apostles, prophets, evangelists and teachers. However, as power continued to be centralised, these trans-local ministries were seen as a threat to the authority of the bishops and therefore died out. Also, deacons became the assistants to the bishops.

Remember also, during this whole period (from 60AD through to 311AD) the church was under severe persecution and was also suffering a number of doctrinal disputes (Docetism, Montanism, Gnosticism, Sabellianism, Manichaeism, Arianism), and so the purpose of centralisation of power into the hands of the bishops was to safeguard the church against heresy, and to have a mechanism for continuity (the bishops could appoint presbyters and deacons). This became the generally accepted form of ecclesiology throughout the church.

Further centralisation developed as gradually four principal churches arose across the Christian world. These were: Alexandria (Egypt), Antioch (Turkey), Byzantium / Constantinople (Greece), Rome (Italy). Jerusalem would have been one of these but, of course, was destroyed in AD70 by Titus. Carthage could also be added to this list as this was a place that was important for North Africa.

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<sup>17</sup> Diarmaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity* (London: Penguin Group, 2009), p.133

Essentially, churches in a region would begin to look to one of these principal churches for leadership and guidance. The bishops of these cities also exercised a significant influence in matters of dispute (e.g., Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria at the Nicene Council of 325AD shaped the Nicene Creed against the protestations of Arius). During this period, the Bishop of Rome began to be called 'Pope' or Papa.

So, by 325AD, we see a Church that has moved from being a collection of independent congregations, founded by apostolic leaders, to being a hierarchical organisation held together by the bishops and centred around four principal cities. These cities also became centres of learning and determined the doctrine of the church as it was developing in this period.

#### 4th to 16th Century

A significant event took place in the first part of the fourth Century. Constantine, having beaten off all challengers, became the undisputed Emperor of the Roman world. What is even more significant is that he had adopted Christianity as his religion and had won his victory using the  $\chi\rho$  as the sign under which he conquered (in Greek, Christ is written  $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ ).

As he came to power, he stopped the persecution and became a benefactor to the church. This meant that political power and wealth suddenly came into the church and the church started to be corrupted as a result.

Up until this point the church had been united, with the exception of those heretics who had broken away (e.g., the Arians), however, the centuries that followed gave rise to further separations and schisms. We will mention briefly just one: the Great Schism.

#### The Great Schism (separation of Eastern Orthodox Church)

There were many factors that led to this schism which had built up over many years. However, the final straw was the *filioque* clause which had been inserted by the Roman Church into the Nicene Creed. Essentially, the argument of the Western Church is that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son. This stands contrary to the theology of the Orthodox Church who have a more mystical notion of the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This came to a head when a Papal envoy arrived in Constantinople in 1054AD to insist on the Roman definition. A key in this is that, by so doing, Rome was affirming its self-perceived of primacy in Christendom. The outcome was that both churches ended up excommunicating each other. This rift has still not been fully repaired. This left Rome as the only dominant power base of the church in the West and helps account for the Catholic Churches insistence on its primacy.

The reason all of this is important to our current discussions on ecclesiology is that it helps explain why the Church worldwide became so divided. It also explains why, with no longer any room for dialogue across the Church, the Catholic Church ended up with so much error in its teaching. The lesson for each one of us is that we need to remain accountable to one another. We need to be willing to be corrected and to serve the greater good of the Body of Christ. My observation, particularly of the Pentecostal Church, is that it suffers from the same tendency to splinter, as people set themselves up in solo ministry having felt a 'call' to do so. The reality is that the whole truth rests in none of us and we need one another to bring correction, accountability and to keep us on track. This needs to be done without creating political hierarchies that keep the Church from being effective. It also gives rise to errant ecclesiologies such as the movement towards deconstructing the church, which we will consider below.

## The Middle Ages

During the next 500 years of church history, we see a time where the power of Rome over the Western Church was broken. This allowed new ecclesiologies to emerge that were less hierarchical in structure. It was also a time of 'getting back to the sources' of scripture. As a result of this, New Testament ecclesiology was rediscovered and that allowed for organic development of leadership and for 'lay' (Gk. *laos* = 'people') leadership to arise. Ultimately this led to the re-establishment of elders and deacons in a New Testament form and for the creation of less-hierarchical, more flexible forms of church governance.

## 16th Century to Present

We start this section with a period of further splintering in the history of the church.

During the Middle Ages, the church had both political and religious power in the West. With the crowning of Charlemagne in 800AD (Holy Roman Emperor), the Pope had assumed the right of prominence over all secular power. The first person to question this openly was John Wycliffe.

John Wycliffe (mid-1320s – 31 December 1384) was an English theologian, lay preacher, Bible translator and reformist. Wycliffe was an early dissident in the Roman Catholic Church during the 14th century. He is considered the founder of the Lollard movement, a precursor to the Protestant Reformation (for this reason, he is sometimes called "The Morning Star of the Reformation"). He was one of the earliest opponents of the notion of papal authority influencing secular power.

Wycliffe was also an early advocate for the translation of the Bible into the common tongue. He completed his translation directly from the Vulgate (Latin version of the Hebrew and Greek scriptures) into vernacular English beginning in the year 1382, now known as the Wycliffe Bible.

According to Wycliffe, the Bible alone was authoritative and, according to his own conviction and that of his disciples, was fully sufficient for the government of this world (*De sufficientia legis Christi*). Without knowledge of the Bible there can be no peace in the life of the Church or of society, and outside of it there is no real and abiding good; it is the one authority for the faith.

For him, the Bible was the fundamental source of Christianity which is binding on all men. Of all the reformers who preceded Martin Luther, Wycliffe put most emphasis on Scripture: "Even though there were a hundred popes and though every mendicant monk were a cardinal, they would be entitled to confidence only insofar as they accorded with the Bible." Therefore, in this early period it was Wycliffe who recognized and formulated one of the two great formal principles of the Reformation - the unique authority of the Bible for the belief and life of the Christian. It is not enough realized that, well before Luther, Wycliffe also recognized the other great Reformation doctrine - that of justification by faith, though not in a fully worked out form as Luther later achieved.

The following is a summary of Wycliffe's teaching:

- that the church does not have authority over the state
- that the church should not be wealthy
- that the Bible is the source of our authority in doctrine and practice
- that the individual can know God without depending on a priest
- that the bread and wine in communion are symbolic only (compared to transubstantiation)

His dissent influenced others across Europe including John Huss in the Czech Republic and later Martin Luther.

### Martin Luther

Luther taught that salvation is a free gift of God and received only through true faith in Jesus as redeemer from sin. His theology challenged the authority of the papacy by declaring that the Bible is the only infallible source of Christian doctrine and countering "sacerdotalism" (the belief in the priesthood of the clergy) with the doctrine that all baptized Christians are a universal priesthood.

Luther was called by the church to recant his theses and when he would not, he was excommunicated on 3rd January 1521. He was branded a heretic and had to go into exile to save himself from execution. This really left Luther little option than to establish a new church, the one thing Augustine had argued against.

Luther argued that, because the Catholic Church had lost sight of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which, he declared, was 'the article by which the church stands or falls', it had lost its claim to be an authentic Christian church.

Key doctrines that formed the basis of the new church Luther formed are as follows:

- Justification by faith alone (sola fides)
- Scripture as the source of doctrine and practice (sola scriptura)
- Re-establishment of marriage for Christian ministers (he himself married an ex-nun)
- Rejection of the doctrine of transubstantiation (although he did not go as far as other reformers in this)
- The priesthood of all believers
- The Rejection of Papal authority

The Lutheran Church retained the Episcopal form. Whilst he argued that the church is constituted by the preaching of the Word of God, he recognised the need for institutional elements to the church. The hope was that the Lutheran Church was a temporary separation but by the 1540s (after the collapse of the Colloquy of Ratisbon held at Regensburg in 1541), Reformers began to realise that any hope for reconciliation with the Catholic Church were fading and so began to consider Protestant doctrines of the church.

### Resulting Reformation

The result of Luther's break with the Catholic Church, and the establishment of the Lutheran church in Germany led to other breakaway movements. This enabled experimentation with other forms of church leadership as the church tried to return to the Biblical roots of church government.

### The Presbyterians

After John Calvin broke from the Catholic Church and moved to Geneva, he set up a Christian Community that was city wide. Calvin held that the marks of a true church are where the Word of God is preached and where the sacraments are rightly administered. He also explored the notion of the visible and invisible church. Also, that the church is 'a divinely founded body, within which God effects the sanctification of the elect'.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> McGrath, p.400

Based on the work of Bucer, another Reformist theologian in Strasbourg, four key offices were identified by Calvin for church leadership: pastors (responsible for pastoral work), doctors (responsible for teaching and scholarship), elders (responsible for disciplinary and organisational aspects of the church) and deacons (responsible for practical service). Effectively, it was church government by committee and these committees came to be called 'presbyteries'.

John Knox, a Scottish clergyman, came to Geneva and saw how the church there was organised. On his return to Scotland, he set about reforming the Church of Scotland and established the Scottish Presbyterians, which has been influential in establishing a non-Episcopal form of church government. This was different from the effect of the Reformation in England where a 'Magisterial' Reformation took place which retained the sovereign as head of the church, retained the episcopal form of government with Bishops and 'priests', and retained much of the liturgy of the Catholic Church, whilst accepting most protestant theology.

### The Anabaptists

The Anabaptists were part of what is known as 'The Radical Reformation'. They took the ideas of Martin Luther to their logical conclusion and sought to re-establish authentic New Testament forms of church, seeing the apostolic church as corrupted through its links to the state so that it had become consumed with power struggles and ambition. Thus, the church needed to become separated from secular society and become an alternative society within the mainstream of sixteenth-century European culture, in the same way as the Early Church had existed in the midst of the Roman Empire pre-Constantine (see Schleithem Confession of 1527).

This was also to be a pure church, and not the church of wheat and tares envisaged by Augustine, and therefore included the notion of 'the ban' (based on Matthew 18:15-20) by which members could be excluded from fellowship if their behaviour so determined. They took seriously the injunction that 'when you come together each one has a psalm,' etc. Their meetings also saw supernatural manifestations such as tongues, prophecy, falling under the power of the Spirit, and so forth. They also had a strong emphasis on living in community with one another, and they rejected all hierarchical forms of church government, but returned to a form of elder leadership. As a result of all of this, they were severely persecuted by both the Catholic and Protestant churches.

### Puritans & Pietists

Back in England, in the early 17th Century, within the existing church, a new desire for a pure, simplified faith broke out. This craved a real, life-changing spirituality and holiness, and a move away from the dead ritual of the Anglican Church. Many Puritans were oppressed by the establishment and left England to set up communities in the United States (these were the founding fathers). They wanted to pursue their faith without interference from the church authorities.

However, some also stayed to reform the church and were part of the English Separatist movement. Drawing upon the theology and example of the Anabaptist Mennonites in Amsterdam, John Smyth and Thomas Helwys established the first Baptist Church in London, England in 1612. This movement grew in England and also spread to America where it became the dominant form of church as English Separatists established communities there.

Essentially, Baptists reject any hierarchal authority. Each local church is autonomous and the Baptist Union is an affiliation of independent churches. There is no official doctrinal basis of the Baptist Church, although many doctrines are widespread and are consistently accepted as the basis for faith.

The Baptist church is democratic in terms of its government. Whilst a pastor or minister may be appointed to lead the church, he / she is subject to the voting rights of all participant members when it comes to matters of policy and the direction of the church.

### The Methodists

Brought up and ordained in the Anglican Church, and as a result of wanting to preach on the streets of England (Epworth to be exact), John Wesley was excluded from the Anglican Church and therefore met with his congregants in alternative meeting places which came to be known as 'chapels'. Ecclesiologically, Wesley never moved away from the Episcopal form. The nomenclature may have changed but Methodist Churches still have ministers who replicate the role of Anglican priests; Circuit Ministers who replicate the role of bishops (in India, the Anglican Church and the Methodist church share bishops); and a President, who takes the role of head of the church.

The innovation of Wesley was the class meeting. Essentially, within his churches, he grouped the members together into cells which met weekly and held each other to account for the state of their spiritual life. Our modern House groups draw directly from this form of government in the local body.

### Brethren & Pentecostals

In the 19th Century in Britain, the Brethren movement arose. With roots in the Anabaptist movement, the key distinctive of this denomination is an emphasis on the priesthood of all believers. Once more, each local congregation is autonomous and is affiliated with others, not through ecclesiological structure, but through a common theology.

Essentially, each local congregation has an eldership and a diaconate. The eldership is selected by other elders and accepted by the church. The eldership chooses the deacons and appoints them to a position of responsibility.

It was this form of church government that was influential on the Pentecostal Movement and later the Charismatic Movement. It is also this form of government that has spread widely throughout the world with the explosion of the church in the 20th Century.

### Key Elements of Pentecostal / Charismatic Ecclesiology

The following are some of the key elements that are fairly consistent in terms of Pentecostal / Charismatic ecclesiology, with one or two exceptions:

- Local autonomy (the Elim Church in the UK is an exception to this having a HQ).
- Plurality of eldership (this does not preclude a 'pastor' as first among equals).
- A diaconate (either formal or informal).
- Recognition of ministry within the wider body (Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors and Teachers some of whom are trans-local).
- Locally appointed leadership based on gifting / calling rather than formal training.
- The Priesthood of all believers (recognition that all in the body have a ministry and gifting that can be used to build up the Body and serve the Kingdom).
- Recognition of the need for organic accountability (This varies throughout these streams. Sometimes apostolic structures are more formal and authority directly

exercised. In others, it is more informal and 'loose'. Some recognise the role of bishops or apostles as overseers of multiple churches or of a stream, whereas others do not).

## Appendix B: New Testament Nomenclature

Within the writings of Paul, authority is not something 'official or sacral. He views it primarily in functional terms'<sup>19</sup>. In other words, these roles were not offices to hold but functions to fulfil within a congregational setting. It was actually the responsibility of all to keep order and work in harmony, and for all to participate in the charismatic flow within the local congregation, but the elders were designated to assure this.

Within the writings of Paul, even though an apostle, we do not see an authoritarian approach to church government. He appeals to them as one who was seminal in their foundation. He encourages them to imitate him rather than to obey him (1 Cor. 4:16, 1 Cor. 11:1, 2 Cor. 5:20, Gal. 4:12, Phil. 3:17, 1 Tim. 5:1, Philemon 1:9). Rarely does he command (1 Cor. 14:37). His emphasis is that a leader is also a servant and has responsibility before God to care of the community of God's people and ensure that they fulfil their mission within a given location.

The New Testament uses two words for the term associated with congregational leaders: *episkopos* (bishop = 'watcher', 'overseer' – 1 Tim 3:1ff.), and *presbuteros* (lit. 'ambassador', usually translated 'elder' - 1 Tim 4:14, 5:17, 1 Pet 5:1).

In 1 Peter 5:1-2, we see the relationship between these two words: the elders (v.1. *presbuteros*) take oversight (v.2 *episkopeo*). The first word designates the functional role and the second word designates the work.

The local churches were thus governed by the *presbuteros* / *episkopos*, and the Apostles, with their trans-local ministry, oversaw the global church, appointing elders, bringing correction (see the epistles of Paul) and generally encouraging and building up the churches that looked to them for leadership. However, all churches were locally governed.

The term 'pastor' or any term other than 'elder' or 'bishop' is invalid from a New Testament perspective with regard to designating the leader of a congregation. Pastoral ministry is functional and therefore is not an office to hold in the same way as apostle, prophet, evangelist and teacher are functional. It is the person who is recognised as the gift of Christ to the Church rather than any appointment to a church office. In other words, I may be recognised as a prophet, but there is no office of a prophet into which I can be appointed. I may function as a teacher, but that is part of my role as an elder of the church. I may be received as an apostle but I will never be appointed to that role. I may be recognised as an evangelist but that is not a role that carries specific authority within the church. Only elders / bishops carry ecclesiological authority from a New Testament perspective.

One thing to note in passing, it is clear from the 'greetings' sections of Paul's epistles, particularly Romans 16, that not all leadership in the church was male. It only became so as the centuries unfolded.

Scholars believe the Johanne churches developed separately from the other apostolically established churches and there is evidence in the writings of John of a much simpler leadership structure. However, by the end of the First Century they had aligned themselves with the rest of the Church.

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<sup>19</sup> R. Banks, 'Church Order and Government' in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*. Eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, Daniel G. Reid (Leicester: IVP, 1993), p.133



## Appendix C: The Cultural Forms of the Church & Church Leadership

### Introduction

In this section we will examine and establish appropriate forms of church governance for our cultural, geographical and historical location.

### Cultural Context

One of the questions that each of us must address in our own cultural context is the extent to which the New Testament model of church is relevant and translatable in our own situation. We must remember that the New Testament was written 2,000 years ago in a Middle Eastern / European context, by people with a different theological background and understanding, a different cultural and world view, and it was written in a language that is now dead. These things do not make it irrelevant but do require us to interpret it and to apply the principles of scripture in our own cultural context.

For example, the discussions about head-covering of women in 1 Corinthians 11 have to do with specific cultural expectations concerning the way women were to dress and the notion that a woman who went around with an uncovered head would normally be a prostitute. Paul, then, lays down some cultural expectations in order to prevent an inappropriate impression being made on outsiders. Is there a principle here that could be applied today? For most of us, this is no longer a cultural issue and therefore we do not impose Paul's strictures in this respect, but there are those who would argue that there is a principle of headship also at stake here. This is just one example of how the Bible needs to be interpreted and applied.

In the same way, as we discussed earlier, Paul lays down some specific requirements with respect to church governance: *ppiskopos / presbuteros* and *diakanoia*. He also gave us some other keys including:

- The principle of plurality of leadership
- The recognition of ministries within the body (Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor & Teacher)
- The notion of servanthood as a fundamental principle of all leadership
- The expectation that ministers of the gospel should earn their living from the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:14)
- Recognition of Apostolic authority

Each of these needs to be thought through and applied in our own culture in a manner that does justice to the Word of God, without imposing structures that will not serve the kingdom.

Part of the problem with the Western churches taking the gospel to the ends of the earth in the 19th and 20th Centuries was that, with it, they also exported their ecclesiological forms and their denominational disputes and rivalries. What we need in each context is not a Western superstructure, but rather a dynamic, local ecclesiology that will work within the specific cultural context. Our structures should:

- Enable the local body to grow so that each member comes to maturity and functions in her / his gifting
- Support those ministering in the local body such that they are not isolated and have a network of encouragement

- Facilitate accountability so that both the local church and the local ministry have an external point of reference should issues or disputes arise amongst them
- Provide for purity and consistency of doctrine and a means of challenging error
- Encourage the planting of new congregations and the expansion of the work of the Kingdom in a region

#### Warnings from History

Our overview of Church History enabled us to identify how church leadership, from its simple Early Church structures, became distorted over the years. This was as a result of a number of factors:

- The death of the Apostles leading to less dynamic trans-local accountability and more formal structures of accountability vested in the bishops
- The rise of heresies which led to a polemical approach to dealing with difference
- The influx of believers from pagan backgrounds who did not have familiarity with the assumptions and inherited theology of those from a Jewish background. Thus pagan (Platonic / Aristotelian) ideology began to influence and modify theology and ecclesiology
- The establishment of Christianity as a state religion which brought the Church into politics and politics into the Church
- The increasing assumption of authority of the bishop of the church of Rome
- The inability of the Church to resolve internal disputes over doctrine and the subsequent splintering of the Church
- The increasing wealth of the Church (particularly in the West) leading to corruption
- The recognition of bishops and elders as 'priests' leading to the clergy / laity divide which halted the universal ministry of the Body of Christ
- The assumption of secular as well as spiritual authority in the Mediaeval church

All of this came to a head at the time of the reformation and the period since then has been a process of recapturing Biblical models of ecclesiology. In order to safeguard against such issues in the future, the following should help us form our local ecclesiology:

- There should be a separation of financial responsibility and accountability away from those in spiritual authority
- Authority for a local church or for a stream of churches should not be vested totally in one man or woman. Whilst an individual can exercise apostolic authority there needs to be a means of submission and accountability so that heresy and error do not creep in and so that the leader does not become too authoritarian
- Disputes within the Body and between Churches need to be handled with reference to the High Priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17. We should also strive to 'keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (Ephesians 4:3)
- We need to ensure that our leaders and our people are properly grounded doctrinally and free from Pagan influence so that error does not creep in

- We need to ensure that we retain our Kingdom focus and not get dragged into the secular politics of our nation. That is not to say that we should not have a voice or that we should not stand up against injustice. But we must remember that we are here to liberate and to prepare a people for eternity in anticipation of the return of the King.
- When appointing church leaders, we need to give as much attention to their character as to their gifting. Are they humble? Do they have the heart of a servant? Or are they proud, self-seeking, and intent on personal gain? In 1 Timothy 3, this is Paul's emphasis when selecting elders and deacons.

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