

THE EMERGING CHURCH OF CHRIST DENOMINATION?

BY

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Introduction:

- A. Churches of Christ have made such a limited impact on the Americas and the world that they are scarcely ever mentioned in books dealing with church history. And when they are, for the most part, they are mentioned as being an off-shoot of the Campbell movement.
- B. Every reputable church historian, and social-intellectual historian, thinks of the churches of Christ as a denomination. In fact, they think of it as an American denomination.
- C. In the Spring of 1980, there is a large group of members within the church of Christ who believe that their religious roots are in the Campbell movement. The number of members making pilgrimages to Bethany is increasing every year. They are looking for their religious "roots" and finding their affinity with the Christian church denomination. Those conducting these guided tours are doing well financially.
- D. The church which belongs to the Christ has its roots in the pages of holy writ. Its founder was the Christ - not Campbell, its birthplace was Jerusalem - not Bethany nor Washington - not Pennsylvania, Virginia, or Kentucky. Its destiny is heaven and not the trash pile of worldly philosophy and compromise which leads to extinction.

I. REPRODUCING THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY IMPLIES:

- A. That there Is a New Testament Church To Be Reproduced.
- B. That The Pattern-Blueprint Can Be Discovered.
- C. That The First-Century Pattern Is The Pattern-Blueprint For Today.
- D. That It Is Desirable To Reproduce The New Testament Church.
- E. That It Is God's Will That It Be Reproduced In Every Age.

II. IT IS POSSIBLE AND DESIRABLE TO REPRODUCE THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH TODAY BECAUSE:

- A. The Relationship Of Christ To The Church Has Not Changed.
- B. The Terms Denoting Ownership Have Not Changed.
- C. The Descriptive Terms Of The Church Have Not Changed.
- D. The Terms Applied To Those Who Compose The Church Have Not Changed.

- E. The Qualifications For Membership Dictated By The Holy Spirit Are The Same.
- F. The Aspects Of Collective Church Worship Are The Same:
 - 1. Lord's Supper, Prayer, Singing.
- G. The Organic Structure Has Not Changed.
 - 1. The exceptions are the work of the apostles and prophets within the First Century Church.
- H. The Standard For Church-Christian Holiness Has Not Changed.
- I. The Mission-Work Of The Church Remains The Same.
- J. Those Who Are Saved Still Constitute The Church.
 - i. If people are still being saved today, then God is still adding them to His church. Therefore, we conclude that the church of the New Testament does exist and it can be reproduced any place on earth where mankind will believe and obey the gospel of Christ.

III. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF IMPLICATIONS INVOLVED IN AFFIRMING A PATTERN FOR THE CHURCH;

- A. That God Gave It.
- B. That God Gave It As A Pattern Throughout Time.
- C. That Man Can Know That There Is A Pattern And That He Can Know - Understand What The Pattern Is.
- D. That He Must Accept The Pattern-Blueprint For The Church.
- E. That He Must Repudiate That Which Is Not Of The Pattern.
- F. That He Must Confront - With Love and Patience - Those Who Drift Away From The Pattern, Or Who Reject It.
- G. That A Deviation From The Pattern Leads To Division.

IV. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT SOME CONGREGATIONS ARE MOVING TOWARDS DENOMINATIONALISM.

- A. A Development Of A Professional Clergy.
- B. A Tendency To Make Doctrinal Compromise With Denominational Friends.
- C. A Copying of Denominational Concepts.

- D. Spending More Money On Social Functions Than On Needs Of Society.
- E. Orienting The Church Along Recreational Lines.
- F. Mission Work Has Taken A Back Seat.
- G. Produced Almost No Nationally-Known Scholars Nor Acclaimed Commentaries And Definitive Religious Books.
- H. Journals For The Most Part Are Pedantic And Shallow.
- I. The Church Is Provincial, Middle-Class, and Mostly White.
- J. A Growing Acceptance Of Instrumental Music As Being An Expedient.
- K. A General Rationalization That People In Denominations Are Not Going To Be Lost. Maybe A Little Error Here And There, But Acceptable To God.
 - 1. This is a major factor in a decline in real personal evangelism. If at the judgment the good people in denominations are not really going to be lost - after all, none of us have a monopoly on the "truth" - why should we risk losing friendship, cause family disorder, and have hard feelings on our jobs and among our business acquaintances if they are not lost.
 - a. We have been wasting millions of dollars in how-to-do-it kits and in salaries over the last twenty years. Some simply do not want to reach the lost, and some - maybe most - do not see the need.
- L. The Church Is Polarizing Around A Few Colleges, Three Journals, A Few Schools Of Preaching, And A Few Leaders.
- M. There Is A Movement, Perhaps Larger Than We Wish To Admit, To Deny Pattern Authority And To Advocate Unity In Diversity.
- N. A Sizable Group Of Preachers And Teachers Are Advocating A New Hermeneutic - An Acceptance As Binding Only That For Which We Have A Direct Command.
- O. Church Historians Already Consider The Church of Christ As An American Demoniation, Mostly Southern, Middle-Class, And White. The Social-Political Observers Consider The Church On The Right-Wing Of The Political Spectrum.
 - 1. If it be said that we, ourselves, do not constitute a denomination, we must ask why objective historians think that we are.

P. Worldliness And Secularism Have Pervaded Our Congregations And The Possibility Of The Church Practicing Discipline On Its More Prominent Members - not to say the peons - Is A Thing Of The Past.

1. This removes one of the doctrinal pillars of any possibility of reproducing the church of our Lord. After all, one doctrinal base is a standard of purity and morality which rises far above the world.

Q. We Have Lost Sight Of The Great Mission Of The Church.

1. We are a definite minority in every large and middle-sized city in the nation. We have less missionaries, most poorly prepared, on foreign soil than 20 years ago. In 65 countries, we have no work. For the most part, the work abroad constitutes one or two families and a handful of members. This after hundreds of years. Most states and large cities in the U. S. remain untouched.

- a. This, from a group of people who have the audacity to tell others that we are the true church - we have the truth - and every other church in the world is a false church.

(i) Isn't it time to be real honest with ourselves.

V. WE MUST ACCEPT THE PREMISE THAT THERE WILL ALWAYS BE DIVISION IN THE CHURCH.

A. As Soon As One Accepts A Pattern He Sows The Seeds Of Division.

1. Because others will not accept the same pattern he does.
2. Because what one person believes essential to a pattern-blueprint other, equally sincere, people will consider a non-essential.
3. Because some deny that there is any pattern of any kind which is binding today.

B. Philosophers-Theologians In The Church Will Constantly Be Making The Text Say Something Other Than What It Says.

1. We believe that one reason the church has not gone into an apostasy sooner is that we have not produced a single philosopher-theologian to take a sizable group down the primrose path.

D. The Concept of Pattern Authority Has Splintered The Church.

1. Sincere souls have appealed to the pattern for one cup, no Bible classes, no women teachers, no instrument of music, no literature, schools in the church budgets, no located preacher, mutual ministry, sponsoring church arrangements, etc.
 - a. To attribute base motives to good brethren who have found different positions within a pattern is unfortunate to say the least.
 - b. Is God, then, the author of division. No! However, most divisions have come because someone "shot from the hip" without a diligent, prayerful, study of the pattern and others followed.
 - (i) However, the problem of essentials and non-essentials will always be with us and our God expects us to learn what is true on this matter.

E. There Will Always Be A Emerging Church of Christ Denomination.

1. The goal is complete unity. But, as long as there is freedom of choice, there will be division.

Conclusion:

- A. We have historically observed the church developed from a property-less group to a property-oriented group. It has moved from a membership consisting of poor and lower middle-class people to a middle-class and upper middle-class membership. It has advanced from the "sect" to the accepted "denominational" status of its religious neighbors.
- B. We have moved from rented buildings across the tracks to affluence where we can and do build bigger and larger spaghetti halls, recreation centers of every kind - and the movement is just begun - a turning inward to entertain ourselves and a crass, loss of conscience for the hundreds of millions who are lost. Our spaghetti needs to choke us with every mouthful, our basketball hoops need to be bent, our swimming pools run dry, our church ball teams stay at the bottom of the ratings, our skating rinks have their floors buckle, - a sickness in our stomachs, with an impulse to vomit - until we can honestly say that we have trained adequately hundreds of thousands of preachers who have preached the glorious gospel of our Lord to every creature under heaven.
 1. It is not enough for the State to continue to raise our property taxes to provide multi-million dollar recreational facilities for our people - now, the elders take our contribution given to help save the lost to entertain us and our children.
 - a. Let it be said that American children are the most

entertained and recreated in all of human history. Members of the church of Christ are no exception.

- C. The vision has vanished from church leaders. A vision of saving every soul on earth, for every generation to come. In too many places, we have become Biblical morons. Church leaders can be intellectually-Biblically sterile, but not physically.
1. We have reared up a generation which does not know the Bible, have few doctrinal convictions, are convinced that their denominational friends are not lost, have doubts about the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures, have little concern for the "pagan", and consider the church something social to fulfill a "need" either real or historical.
- (i) Brethren, we are fast drifting.

