

An Urgent Inquiry into the Nature of the Church

by Steve Blackwell

I have written in the past how I came to understand that most of what we see exhibited as the "Church" in the world is not the Church the Holy Spirit has revealed through the pages of the New Testament. Any honest perusal of those pages will show plainly that there is no similarity between the early Church of the Apostles and what followed as the visible church after about three hundred years; and especially obvious is the contrast with all the showiness of the church, Protestant and Catholic, of the twenty-first century. Some will argue for the natural changes in culture and the individual personality traits of its future professors, as the cause. *"The evolution of change is unavoidable,"* they will say. My contention is that the change in "Church" definition and its appearance is a direct product of evil and disobedience, and I think the Bible will agree. Even many who will agree with me that the Church has prostituted itself, and reject a lot of what the Church has become, continue to hold on to a false hierarchical structure, and attendance based meetings, at religious buildings they call the "Church." Some of these men, who I greatly admire for their work, just cannot get past this part of the lie, and continue to promote the pride of position, stature, and the adoration of buildings and programs, as characteristic of the Body of Christ. These things, along with many others, are only part of the attire by which the prostitute has made herself acceptable to men who are attracted to such things. A prostitute always makes her appeal to the appetites of the flesh. Isn't that really what a prostitute does? For a prostitute to succeed she must excite our lust and desire, and offer satisfaction. I also contend that the unpretentious Church of the Apostle's still exist , and that it is small, hidden from the world, as to its outward display, and persecuted whenever it becomes vocal or discovered.

An Unbroken Thread

From the very beginning the prominent signature of Christians was their ability to draw or attract troubles individually and to be persecuted as a community. Jesus bears witness to this characteristic as a means of identification of His true followers. *"If the world hates you, remember, it is because they hated Me first," John 15:18.* He also tells us that His message of truth is intolerable to those who live in darkness. It is very little known or acknowledged, by Christians, that it was the "church" of Jesus' day, the Pharisees and Sadducees, who persecuted and killed the very Messiah who they said they were waiting for. History documents the fact that it was also the religious establishment of the day, predominantly the Catholics, that mercilessly persecuted the living and true Body of Christ, i.e. the true Church, and still does at present. In Paul's letter to Timothy he expressly states that, *"All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution," 2 Timothy 3:12.* This is a recurring theme in the New Testament and history. Exploring this thought, and the suffering tone in which they delivered their message or prophesy, it is easy to differentiate between the true and the un-true when considering the nature of the Church. If the "Church" is not being hated or persecuted then it is not being the Church at all. Either Jesus and Paul were exaggerating with their statements, mistaken, lying, or they were speaking an essential truth which is mysteriously missing in the character makeup of the visible church today.

Could it be that we have looked in the wrong place to find the Church and the truth of its makeup and appearance? Could it be that the real Church is not on Main Street, but invisible and hidden, and not promoting itself, not marketing itself, and not a part of the vast religious complex of spires, stained

glass, robes and gowns, liturgies and creeds, indulgences, icons and veneration, crucifixes and dead men's bones, false visions and Mariolatry; nor the man adoration of pastors, reverends, cardinals, bishops, or popes? Could it be that the real Church is not emerging, as some modern liberals are misinformed, but has never ceased to exist since its conception and birth, but lives in smallness, isolated and separated, as the Bible instructs?

The Truth of History

In the far reaches of history past, lost for the most part to the average person, God has worked through small companies of the faithful, whose memories and testimonies have been obliterated through the prejudice of a flesh driven organized Christianity, which saw in its life and testimony, an indictment of its own spiritual paralysis, and a threat to its existence. The Scriptures are irrefutable as to the fact that the visible church is deluded, and is enjoying a status in the world that is the fabrication of evil, through the relentless disobedience of egotistic and proud men led on by the forces of Lucifer. You will search in vain to find the Protestant or Catholic Church, in the pages of God's inspired Word; it simply doesn't exist. What you will find is the very condemnation of that same man-made fabrication, beginning with Babel (*Genesis 11:5-8*) and ending with Rome (*Revelation 17*).

The history of Christianity shows the ebb and flow of once separated and devoted Christians getting hung up on the rocks of selfishness and compromise, leading to the promotion of the grand edifice of modern Christendom. With each successive generation of Christianity, church history shows more and more the warped minds of men, determined to build something for God on earth, whereas the early Christians had no continuing city, but looked for the one to come, *Hebrews 13:14*. Small communities of the faithful, holding onto the example of Scripture, rejected the organized church and became vocal for the sake of truth, risking everything to follow Christ. These small groups of persecuted Christians, that are virtually unknown today and usually only mentioned in passing, are really the main focus of the Almighty; but even amongst these faithful lay the latent seeds of sin and rebellion.

History, carefully examined, will reveal that the Church has had those souls who through revelations of the Spirit found strength to continue in the narrow way of Jesus. When the waves of change began coming ashore and the pounding surf of heresy and rebellion unleashed, these separated ones opted for the simple life of the carpenter. This recognition of the false overtaking the true, and the desire to return to the pattern laid down in Holy Scripture, is a recurring theme throughout history, and is being experienced, even in this late hour.

Conceit and Vainglory

Conceit is a favored weapon of the Adversary. Wherever conceit has been allowed to take root and grow it has had a weakening effect on Church life and order.

Conceit, or "*vainglory*," as John Bunyan calls it, being the opposite of humility, is characterized by an excess of pride, displayed in showiness, and focused on one's "*self*" or group. We can all recognize this trait in ourselves, and after many years of being in the company of those who are mutually conceited it has become an accepted trait, tolerated and maybe even liked in ourselves, but despised in others. Now take this template of general evolving conceit and overlay it on the visible organized Church and

it becomes apparent that this inherited human evil is very much at the core of all religious life in the world. What has happened to the world in general has happened to the Church, but the faithful elect, recognizing the scaly backside of the serpent separates itself, in a repeated cycle, for now two thousand years in an effort to return to a more pure, Christ-like, holiness.

This general attitude of conceit, finding fertile soil in certain sections of the Church in early years, allowed for the advance of debilitating changes which gradually established themselves as foundational element of Church order.

After the initiation of the Church by Christ and the Apostles, there is only sketchy information for the next 200 years. What we know for sure is that Christianity spread rapidly throughout the world, and it was causing problems worthy of the attention of the Roman Emperor Trajan about the year A.D. 112. We know also that the winds of change were blowing. What had started out as simple dependence upon the ever present Lord, fellowshiping with followers, caring for each other, sharing meals, education, being a family, everyone contributing their gift, talent, or resources, began to show signs of internal manipulation to organize and expedite, placing trust in programs, rather than the Lord. Coming out of this initial period of Church growth emerges a distinct tendency to rely on the authoritarian leadership of conceited men who have promoted themselves as leaders to be respected and honored, along with Christ of course. The *“Church”* is now to be found divided: those who would follow Christ only, remaining small and humble, and those who would opt for a more human adaptation, characterized by plans, organization, and programs, to expedite and shortcut God’s own way of faith and dependence. The focus of history is primarily on this outward organization, controlled by men who have marketed their creation as the true Church.

By the time we reach the third century the visible organized Church has totally displaced the tiny organism birthed by the Spirit of Christ as recorded in the Book of Acts. The transition from an elder guided body to authoritarian leadership, where a single man is positioned as the head (either self-appointed or by consent), is now completely formed and in place. Whenever humble dependence on the Lord is slack, a man will step in and take up the slack, and eldership degenerates into a committee with a strong willed man at the lead. Of course the real tragedy of this is that its success, or failure, is of man and not God; it is a purely human expedient to receive spiritual benefits through the flesh. Fleshly means can only produce fleshly results, both eternal, and temporal. It is now, at this third century, that the monarchical bishop firmly arises, although we do find it mentioned in the early second century in Ignatius, the Bishop of Antioch, where he places great stress on the importance of the office, and its absolute authority. The vehemence with which he defended the position is evidence that his views were greatly disputed by those who see the office as an infringement on God’s sovereignty.

It would appear that the motivating force behind this conceit is to help God, by expediting the Churches reaction to the growing evil of heresy. Rather than have the elders guide and instruct the flock in the Scriptural handling of internal issues, Ignatius commanded affairs with the absoluteness of one supposedly sanctioned by God Himself. By the middle of the second century Ignatius’ views were generally accepted. During this time Rome was still under the guidance of elders, and not a *“single rule Bishop.”* Even Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, who along with Ignatius personally knew the Apostles, writing to the Church at Philippi addressed the letter to the *“elders”* and not to a bishop. The one man rule of the bishopric was a human phenomenon, and not spiritual at all. Even before our Lord’s

crucifixion He put His Disciples on alert to beware of the tendency of the flesh to exult itself by wanting to lord it over the flock, just like the gentile world does. John writes of such a person in his third epistle, Diotrephes. Diotrephes seemed to know more, and better, than the Apostles, and “loved the preeminence” of leadership and authority.

This was the infancy of a wretched scourge that had seriously infected the young Church, and that was to become a malignant cancer that would not be content to destroy itself, but would infect all that it touched. She who was once dressed in the white of virgin purity, void of human design, is now adorned as a harlot in purple and scarlet, riding on the back of a scarlet colored beast, drunk on the blood of the true saints of God, committing fornication with the kings of the earth, drinking from the goblet of her own filthiness. *Babylon the Great* is her name, *The Mother of Prostitutes* and of the *Abominations of the Earth*.

This is the portrait of Anti-Christ. The Anti-Christ is not one who opposes Christ; that is the popular belief. The Anti-Christ is one who is in the place of Christ; now who would that be? There is no mystery here for those who chose to believe the Bible; it is plain before our eyes. Christians look in vain for the Anti-Christ to appear. They look for some mysterious figure to show up on the stage of time proclaiming to be Christ, when he is already here. Jesus said, “*For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many*” *Matthew 24:5*. The truth is they don’t want to see the fact because her tentacles reach far and wide, and her influence prostrates kings and presidents. Her sword has touched the mighty and the weak, and her morals make even the depraved blush. In the name of justice she slaughters the innocent, and in the name of her own righteousness she lets the guilty go free. She makes all pretensions of virtue while lifting her skirt to the vilest of the vile. Who is this mysterious harlot who stands in the place of Christ, proclaiming to be Christ? It is none other than the Pope, the “*Vicar of Christ*,” that is in the place of Christ. The Pope pretends his words are infallible and condemns with his mouth sixty million innocent believers over a six hundred year period, to not only death, but torture and mutilation, during the Inquisition/Crusade. The Pope, with his infallible tongue, declared them heretics because they chose to believe the Scriptures instead of him. With that same tongue he lifts a crust of bread and glass of wine and proclaims it to be the living Christ, he declares one to be saved or lost according to his preference, or magically creates a holding pin called purgatory, they put their own filthy tradition on the same scale as Scripture, they excommunicate their own priest if they marry but blink at their activity with young children and prostitutes, he proclaims Mary to be forever virgin and sinless although she had other children calling God her savior, and claims that the fullness of salvation is not through Jesus but through the Catholic Church, and says that confession to Christ for sins is not enough that confession to a priest is absolutely necessary, and the Pope approves of the worship of idols by claiming they are not idols but icons and that they don’t worship them but venerate them, and the list could go on and on.

Today the Vatican cannot commit wholesale murder for the sin rejecting her filth, but must work through other means, like Hitler, who was a Catholic, and claimed to finish what the Catholic Church started, by killing six million Jews in the Holocaust. The Catholic Church has not changed her ways, only her methods. What she cannot do overtly she does covertly. While putting on airs of high morality she is the epitome of all that is gross and immoral, as all of history proves. She is evil come as an angel of light, a wolf in sheep’s clothing devouring and making merchandise of men’s souls. The Vatican’s goal is to have dominion over the whole world, using any means possible, as is sworn to in the Jesuit’s oath, aka the Gestapo of the Vatican, and the engineers from Hell.

The Inquisition has never ended, and as the Bible clearly states, the previous methods of extermination of heretics i.e., those who do not bow to the Pope, will be reinstated with a vengeance. The one-world government and religion that is to come, is even now forming under the banner of ecumenism. The Protestant Churches in America are coming on board with Rome, as the Bible also states would happen in the great falling away or apostasy. But, it must be made clear that God will always preserve a remnant that will follow Jesus as His bold witnesses to the truth of Scripture.

As history has shown there will always be those who hear and see what the majority of believers and dwellers on earth will not comprehend, although it is right before their eyes, hidden in plain sight.

The nature of the true Church is not what you think; she is making herself ready, filling her lamps with oil, separating, and purifying, and watching the eastern sky; she is careful of what she sees and where she walks, taking every thought captive. She has laid all her worldly possessions and her life also, on the altar of God, and is ready with the testimony of Jesus her Bride Groom, the spirit of prophecy. This is the true Church.

The warning has been preached all through the Bible, *"So God will cause them (rebels) to be greatly deceived, and they will believe these lies."*

"After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, 'Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage for every unclean and hated bird!'" (Revelation 18:1-2).

"And I heard another voice from heaven saying, 'Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues. For her sins have reached to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities'" (Revelation 18:4-5).

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