The Church and the School of Christ

So that we might learn to live as the Lord Jesus lived and grow up to the measure of the stature of His fulness, God made provision in His plan for the Church, which is **the Body of Christ.** (But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 1 Corinthians 12:18)

Holy Scripture describes the Church of Christ as a family, with infants, children and parents, where we live **closely bound to one another** and grow until we become like the Lord.

The one who is born of God is placed in the family and in the school of Christ, to grow as a disciple until he reaches the stature of a perfect man, **the measure of the stature of His fulness.** (And he gave some… pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints… till we all come… unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. Ephesians 4:11-13)

The Role of the Church

In the Church we learn self-denial, humility and godliness; we learn to offer ourselves as servants of Christ; we learn to live in righteousness as He lived.

We must live as He lived, because only in this way will His character traits be stamped upon us: longsuffering, goodness, meekness, love… and this can happen only in His school, which is the Church. (He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked. 1 John 2:6)

If we look a little more closely, we can easily see that everything to do with a person's salvation, from the new birth until we reach the stature of a perfect man, is strikingly similar to what we meet in this short life on earth.

When someone comes into the world, we witness the birth of a child, which is very much like being born again into the Kingdom of God. (For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. 1 Corinthians 4:15-16)

A natural baby cannot choose the family he will grow up in; those he was born to will be his family. To grow, the natural baby is fed with his mother's milk. Everything is completely new to the newborn child. He takes in everything he sees and hears from his parents.

So it is with the one who is born again: he finds himself in a family with spiritual parents (the Body of Christ, which is the Church), who feed him with spiritual milk like a baby. (I… could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but… even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat. 1 Corinthians 3:1-2)

He takes in everything he sees and hears from his spiritual parents. (As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children. 1 Thessalonians 2:11)

A little later, the natural child is enrolled in school and then, after a time, he graduates… In this world we cannot imagine anyone becoming a doctor without going to medical school and without teachers.

The same must happen with the spiritual child. You cannot reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ without being a disciple in His school. (He departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. Acts 19:9)

God gives us new birth, gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us, and places us in His school, where we have spiritual parents and teachers, so that we are raised according to the standard of His Kingdom.

He has given us everything we need to reach the stature for which we were created. (From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body. Ephesians 4:16)

This school of discipleship has only one aim: that the disciple should become like the Master. We must all go through this school, whose final goal is that the image of His Son be formed in us. (The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master. Luke 6:40)

The Son of God was sent to earth by the heavenly Father to establish the Church, which is the Body of Christ. He is the founder of the school of discipleship, of the Church, which He tenderly cares for. (I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matthew 16:18; For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church. Ephesians 5:29)

The Lord Jesus made disciples, then sent them into all the world so that they in turn would make other disciples and enrol in the school of Christ whoever wishes to enter that school. (Go ye therefore, and teach all nations… teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20)

We can take the Lord's disciples as an example, and above all the apostle Paul. He devoted his whole life to the service of the Church of Christ. He made disciples and taught them so that he could present them before God as disciples made perfect in Christ. (Warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; **that we may present every man perfect** in Christ Jesus: **whereunto I also labour,** striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily. Colossians 1:28-29)

Only in His school can the relationships between disciples be adjusted until full maturity and unity in all things are reached, a unity that will also be found in His eternal Kingdom. (That

they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. John 17:21)

The Adding of the Members

God places the members in the Body of Christ in much the same way as He placed them in the human body: the heart in its place, the pancreas in its place, the fingernail in its place, each with its own functions. (But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. 1 Corinthians 12:18)

God does not make any member grow outside the body, because, separated from the body, it can have neither life nor growth. Take the kidneys, for example: they cannot live somewhere outside the body. They sit within the body, closely joined to other members, from which they receive and to which they pass on what they have received.

So it is with the members of the Body of Christ. No member can grow on its own, independently of the body. (Let no man beguile you of your reward… and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God. Colossians 2:18-19)

A person has to go through various trials so that, by the end of the school, he acquires the character traits of the Lord Jesus and is found worthy to dwell with God and with all those who have completed this school of discipleship and have His traits stamped on their character.

Let us take longsuffering as an example. How can we come to have it stamped on our character?

First we learn and take in the Lord's teaching about not resisting; then, when trials come upon us, we put it into practice by following in the footsteps of our spiritual parents, who in turn follow in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus. (And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Matthew 5:40-41)

Each one of us must pass through this school of patience, which does its perfect work, because only in this way is our character made perfect. (My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. James 1:2-4)

Those who are our parents will watch over how we apply the Lord's teaching in everyday life. When our rights or our possessions are taken from us, we must follow their example and the Lord's, and live as He lived.

Today's Churches

Even though God's plan is so clear, for most of us the Church, which is the Body of Christ, remains a great mystery; for many, the church is merely the place where believers gather for worship. (This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:32)

From what we see almost everywhere today, we notice that Satan has managed to distort the role of the family and the meaning of the Body of Christ. Through the false teaching that "**salvation comes down to nothing more than the forgiveness of sins**" (a teaching that lies at the foundation of religious organisations), he has deceived people into thinking there is no need for discipleship, nor for a school of discipleship.

We can easily see that discipleship to Christ is nonexistent in today's religious organisations, and almost no one believes he must live as a disciple in order to reach the stature of his Master.

On the foundation of this false teaching, Satan has managed to deceive people into thinking that "the Church" amounts to nothing more than worship in buildings fitted out with preaching halls, where people receive only a religious education.

First of all, he worked to replace the spiritual **parents/shepherds**, who are charged with raising their children, with pastors who lead through preaching, ministers devoted only to worship programmes, whose sole task is institutional education and keeping the flock scattered, not raising children at all. (The wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. John 10:12)

In this way the Church has become merely a centre of religious education and has lost its purpose; it is no longer the place set apart for the growth and perfecting of the saints, which the heavenly principalities look upon and marvel at. (To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. Ephesians 3:10-11)

If we look at today's religious organisations, we can easily see how well Satan has succeeded in deceiving mankind, for they all practise this institutionalised system of worship. From Catholics, Orthodox and Lutherans to the evangelical movements, all follow the same pattern of organisation, with buildings constructed specially for worship and preaching.

So whoever wishes to live out the life of discipleship in practice, which involves a baby (child)–parent relationship, will find himself in the absurd situation of not finding a single spiritual parent. This happens because today most congregations are completely lacking in spiritual parents such as Paul was to Timothy, Titus and Onesimus; they have been replaced by pastor-preachers, committee members, youth leaders… (Thou therefore, my son, be strong. 2 Timothy 2:1)

How We Relate to One Another in the Church

Spiritual parents are those whom the Holy Spirit has appointed and made worthy to ensure both the growth and the safekeeping of the children. (Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. Acts 20:28)

For them to be able to do this, the children must obey them in all things. (Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. 1 Peter 5:5)

Scripture describes submission as complete obedience, turning aside neither to the right hand nor to the left. (According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left. Deuteronomy 17:11)

Only in this way can we be made perfect: only if we obey those set over us in all things. (Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account. Hebrews 13:17; And he gave some… pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints. Ephesians 4:11-12)

It is good to understand the difference between education and being raised under parental authority. Through preaching we receive only teaching, not parental upbringing.

We can see how great the difference is when we look at an orphan and at a child who has parents. Both receive an education. But the child who has parents will, in addition to his education, have them beside him to build his character, to encourage him in what is good and to correct him where he goes wrong. The orphan, on the other hand, will have no one beside him to correct him when he does wrong.

We must understand clearly that we will not be able to grow up to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ unless we have spiritual parents. In Paul's letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon, Holy Scripture gives us the apostle Paul as an example of a spiritual parent.

Even though Timothy and Titus were of great spiritual stature, the apostle Paul still counselled them and commanded them how to conduct themselves in the spiritual life. (For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. 1 Corinthians 4:15; This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy… 1 Timothy 1:18)

We urge the reader not to want to be in an institutionalised congregation that practises only worship and preaching, to be alone like an orphan, and so to avoid the Body of Christ, which is fitly joined together and compacted.

Let us flee from any congregation that does not practise care and submission, that has no spiritual parents. That is the work of Satan, with which he has deceived the religious world; the Body of Christ is not there.

Let us long to be in a body where the whole Word of Christ can be fulfilled, where every member does its part so that we reach the stature for which we were created, so that the image of Christ is stamped upon us.

This article is taken from the booklet Transformed into the Image of Christ, available free online in .pdf format.

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