The Church, the School of Christ

For most of us, church is the place where people sing, pray and listen to a sermon, after which everyone goes off about their own business. Most members are spectators: their ministry is to be present in the pew and to contribute a sum of money towards the needs of the congregation. In large congregations, members know one another only by sight, and people whom no one has seen at the meetings for years remain on the list. But is this the Church of which the Lord Jesus said: “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)?

Today's Church, far from its calling

At the root of this condition lies a widespread teaching: that salvation amounts to nothing more than the forgiveness of sins. Discipleship and the school of Christ then seem superfluous. The Church has thus become a centre of religious education, with meetings two or three times a week, and the place of spiritual parents, who should raise those who are born again, has been taken by preachers and programme organisers. The result is what Scripture calls the scattered flock: sheep that “My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them.” (Ezekiel 34:6). What remains is “a form of godliness”, but without its power (2 Timothy 3:5).

What the Church is according to God's plan

Scripture describes the Church as the body of Christ: “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.” (Colossians 1:18). It is not we who choose our place in this body, but “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.” (1 Corinthians 12:18). And the members are closely joined to one another: “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 unto the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:16). Just as a kidney cannot live outside the body, neither can a disciple grow on his own.

The purpose of this body is clear. God has given the Church ministers “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:” (Ephesians 4:11-13). No one has the Lord's features from the start; they are formed through the Word, through the Holy Spirit and through the members of the body.

The school of Christ: from babe to full-grown man

Scripture also speaks of the Church as a family, with little children, young men and fathers (1 John 2:12-14). The one who is born again is not left to grow up alone. At first he receives “milk”, as a babe in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1-2), and then, as he grows, solid food.

No one becomes a doctor without going to university; in the same way, no one attains to the stature of Christ without being a disciple in His school. But education is not the same thing as upbringing. An orphan and a child with parents may attend the same school, yet only the child with parents has someone beside him to encourage him and correct him. The sermon gives teaching; the family of God gives upbringing.

Let us take longsuffering as an example. The disciple first learns the words of the Lord: “But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matthew 5:39). Then, when the trial comes, he puts them into practice, following in the footsteps of his spiritual parents, who in turn follow in the footsteps of the Lord. In this way patience comes to have “But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” (James 1:4). This is the aim of the school: “The disciple is not above his master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his master.” (Luke 6:40).

The spiritual parent

In the school of Christ, the greatest gift a babe receives is a spiritual parent. Paul makes a clear distinction: “For though ye have ten thousand instructers in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.” (1 Corinthians 4:15). The instructor passes on knowledge; the parent begets, raises and is responsible for his children until they reach maturity.

Paul was such a parent to the churches he founded. To the Corinthians he wrote: “as my beloved children I warn you… Wherefore I beseech you, follow in my footsteps” (1 Corinthians 4:14, 16), and he added: “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.” (2 Corinthians 12:15). In Ephesus, for three years, “night and day”, he did not cease “Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” (Acts 20:31), teaching them “And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,” (Acts 20:20). He reminded the Thessalonians that he had behaved among them “as a nurse who lovingly brings up her children” and that he had been “to each one of you what a father is to his children: we exhorted you, we comforted you” (1 Thessalonians 2:7, 11). And for the Galatians he once again felt “the pains of childbirth”, “until Christ be formed” in them (Galatians 4:19).

With Timothy and Titus this bond can be seen even more clearly. Timothy is “To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” (2 Timothy 1:2), “For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.” (1 Corinthians 4:17), who served alongside Paul “But ye

know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel." (Philippians 2:22). Titus is "To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour." (Titus 1:4). Timothy closely followed not only Paul's sermons but his life: "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience," (2 Timothy 3:10). Even when they had reached maturity, both of them still received guidance and charges from their father (Titus 1:5; 1 Timothy 1:18), and in their turn they were to commit what they had received "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (2 Timothy 2:2).

This is the role of the spiritual parent: he begets through the Gospel, feeds with milk and then with solid food, counsels, comforts and rebukes, watches with tears, lives as an example to be followed and does not stop until he sees the image of Christ formed in his children. Today these things have almost disappeared. We have preachers, leaders and committees, but almost no one has the courage any longer to say: "These are my dearly beloved children in the Lord, whom I am raising from infancy to maturity."

Where do you stand?

It is of vital importance to know what kind of congregation we are in. Let us ask ourselves: am I closely joined to other members, or do I merely sit in the pew beside them? Do I have spiritual parents who watch over me? Do I bear anyone's burdens (Galatians 6:2)? If I were absent from the meetings for a month, would anyone come looking for me?

An examination in the light of Scripture

Most people judge their congregation by what they are used to seeing: a beautiful building, a good choir, well-constructed sermons. But the measure by which God judges the Church is not custom, but His Word. Just as a pair of scales is checked against the standard weight and not against other scales, so our congregation is not to be checked against other congregations, but against Scripture.

This is also the purpose of the Cuvânt Curat website: to help the one who truly desires to place his life and his congregation in the light of unaltered Scripture, without the additions of tradition and without the cuts of convenience. The booklets, sermons and studies here do not ask to be taken on trust, but to be checked with an open Bible: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (1 Thessalonians 5:21). John warns us: "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (1 John 4:1). Whoever undertakes this examination with a sincere heart does not remain in darkness: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105).

We invite you to read the booklet "The Church – the Body of Christ". In it you will learn what the Lord says about the churches of our day, how His closely joined body functions, what the role of each member is, and by what signs a living Church is distinguished from a dead one.

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