The Church in Our Day

For a great many of us, the Church of Christ no longer has the purpose God gave it. It is easy to see how we have picked up from one another the idea that what is generally called *"the Church"* is a place where people with shared religious interests gather.

We have been taught to believe that it is the place where people sing, pray, take part in a religious programme, socialise a little once the programme is over, and then each goes off to his own personal concerns and interests. So, for many, the Church has become nothing more than a place to recover the peace of mind they lose during the week because of their busy lifestyle.

The vast majority of members are simply spectators at these religious programmes. Their service consists of being present, sitting in the pew, and contributing a certain amount of money to the needs of the congregation. A very small number of members have the task of putting on *this programme.*

So we have been assured that, after we are born again, God is somewhere far away and does not get very involved in a person's life. And that first stage is about where most of us stay. We went to church, we had our seat, we confessed our sins, we were baptised, we sang, we upheld the teachings of the church we belong to, convinced that this is how we would enter the Kingdom of God. And so, in these congregations, the ordinary member is a mere consumer. Nothing is expected of him; attending the meeting is his only duty. In most large congregations, the members know one another only by sight.

Because of these teachings, many of those on the membership list no longer come to these programmes, and the buildings are fairly empty at certain services. In many congregations there is a wide gap between the membership list and those who actually attend worship. And so we have come to think it perfectly normal for a congregation to have many people who have not come to a meeting in months or even years and yet remain on the membership list.

From what we see almost everywhere today, it is clear that Satan has succeeded in distorting the role of the Church, the meaning of the Body of Christ. Through the false teaching that "salvation is nothing more than the forgiveness of sins" (a teaching that lies at the foundation of the great religious organisations), he has deceived people into believing that there is no need for discipleship or for the school of Christ.

Most of us have been taught that God has done everything for us, that through faith in the sacrifice on the cross we obtain salvation, which consists of the forgiveness of sins. We have been taught that perfection of character cannot be attained, and that no one can add anything to the work of salvation accomplished on the cross.

Discipleship

Through this false teaching he set out to abolish discipleship and the importance of the school of Christ (the Church), deceiving people into thinking that these are not part of the plan of salvation. Satan has worked hard to keep us from understanding the role the Body of Christ plays in the growth and perfecting of the saints.

The doctrine that salvation comes down to nothing more than the forgiveness of sins has led many to attach no importance to the Body of Christ. Those who have accepted this teaching have had their eyes closed to the role of the Church, and they no longer see their need of the Body of Christ and of the members to whom they should be closely joined. This applies both to those on the membership lists of congregations that amount to nothing more than worship programmes and to those who have chosen to live out their life of faith on their own. *(And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field. Ezekiel 34:5)*

Both of these situations are very dangerous, because they are in fact a rejection of Christ's work of growing and building up the members in the Church, in His Body. (Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Ephesians 5:25; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Ephesians 2:21)

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

We can easily see that this teaching has made discipleship to Christ non-existent in today's religious movements, and hardly anyone still believes that he must live as a disciple in order to reach the measure of the stature of his Teacher.

Anyone willing to look more closely will notice that Satan, like a great merchant, has spared no effort to build a vast religious empire with which to keep people in darkness, so that they will not know the truth about the Church of Christ.

So in every country he has set up religious organisations (like supermarket chains) that offer people only **religious programmes**, and he has managed to catch billions of people in this trap. Not one of them has built into its doctrine the discipleship whose sole aim is to reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

If we look at these religious movements, we can easily see how successfully Satan has deceived humanity, since all of them practise this institutionalised system of worship. From Catholics, Orthodox and Lutherans to the newer Protestant and evangelical movements, all follow the same pattern of organisation, with buildings constructed specially for worship and preaching. 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, at which the heavenly powers look and marvel. (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)

First of all, Satan worked to replace the spiritual fathers, the shepherds who are charged with raising their children (their disciples). They have been replaced by pastors who lead the preaching, by ministers devoted solely to worship programmes, whose only task is religious education and keeping the flock in a scattered state, rather than raising children. (The wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. John 10:12)

As a result, anyone who wants to live out the life of a disciple in practice, which requires a relationship between an infant (a child) and a parent, will find himself in the absurd position of not being able to find a single spiritual father.

This happens because today, in these religious organisations, spiritual fathers such as the apostle Paul was to Timothy, Titus, Onesimus and many others are entirely missing. They have been replaced by pastor-preachers, committee members, youth leaders… (see Paul's letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon)

For those who accept the pattern of a church built on religious programmes, the real Church, in which the members are closely joined to one another and together make up the Body of Christ, remains a great mystery. For those who hold on to this pattern, the Church described in Holy Scripture has no practical application. (This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:32)

The question each of us must ask is this: What mystery does the Church hold? For whom is it a mystery? Is it a mystery to us as well?

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