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THE SCRIPTURAL DEFINITION OF THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

1. Necessity for this study. Our discussion today on the NATURE OF THE CHURCH comes at a time when this subject is receiving renewed interest and study throughout Christendom. Liberals as well as conservatives and evangelicals are giving the doctrine of the Church reconsideration. The current flow of Christian literature on this subject is prolific. On the other hand, we observe with dismay, the absence of a doctrine of the Church among the new sects which arise in our day. Many of these so-called Christian movements have either no concept of the nature of the Church, or a perverted and false idea of what the Church of Christ actually is. The word CHURCH is many different things to different people. To the high churchman it means an established form of religion, to the Romanists it means the papal system, and to many Protestants it merely means a denomination, or a building for worship. Our own history as Mennonite Brethren people is like a long spiritual pilgrimage. Coming out of the Roman Church, then the Reformers Church, then out of the Mass Mennonite Church (1860), we have behind us a long struggle. The basis of these crises experiences has mostly been over the nature of the Church. This, therefore, throws upon us in these critical days of religious confusion the necessity of giving ourselves to a re-orientation of what the nature of the New Testament Church actually is.

2. Terminology used in the New Testament.

(1) Church: (Ecclesia) There are two words used in the New Testament to describe the nature of the Church in its form and essence. These words are "church" and "Fellowship." The word Church (Greek "ecclesia") appears twice in the gospels (Matt. 16:18; 18:17) and 102 times in the Acts and the Epistles. "Ecclesia" means an assembly or gathering of people. The term covers the two ideas of "coming together" and "being together." It is a general term not exclusively used for Church gatherings, as for example in Acts 7:38 it refers to Israel and in Acts 19:32 it refers to the gathering of a heathen mob. Certainly the New Testament word "Church" does not refer to a building of worship, a denomination, nor even to the so-called "invisible church;" it merely conveys the idea of a people gathered together for a central purpose. "The popular concept of the 'ecclesia' being 'those called out of the world' is hardly intrinsic in the term itself, though the idea of of Christian separation from the world is a New Testament teaching. What 'ecclesia' emphasizes is the purposiveness of the assembled community, not the background out of which the assembled ones have come." The basic thought stresses "the called together" rather than "the called out ones."

(2) Fellowship: (Koinonia) In order to fully understand the concept of the Church in the New Testament we need to notice the frequent use of the term "Fellowship." The Greek word for fellowship, "Koinonia," also was a common term used in New Testament times generally given to mean "partnership" or "Joint participation." It was used to describe business partnership, friends, or fellow-citizens. In the religious sense it was used to describe the fellowship meals in the mystery cults where men ate together with each other and with their gods. In the New Testament "fellowship" describes the relationship of a Christian to Christ as in Phil. 3:10 "The fellowship of His sufferings," and more frequently the fellowship among believers as in Acts 2:42 "and they continued steadfastly in the apostles

doctrine and 'fellowship.'" Note the frequent use of "fellow" as in fellow-servant (Col. 1:7) fellow-workers (Rom. 16:21) fellow-citizens (Eph. 2:19) fellow-soldiers (Phil. 2:25), etc. The idea of Christians sharing together reached the point where the early Church shared material possessions (Acts 2:44f). Joint participation and mutuality is the basic concept inherent in this term. The Church in the New Testament is described then to be a gathered people of God in the fellowship one with another. The nature of the Church is based on a fellowship which is both horizontal and vertical. The terms Church and fellowship should be considered together since they are used interchangeably in the New Testament to describe the Church. Emil Brunner says, "The 'ecclesia' of the New Testament, the fellowship of Christian believers is precisely not that which every Church is at least in part--an institution, a something. The body of Christ is nothing other than a fellowship of persons. It is the fellowship of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9) or fellowship of the Holy Ghost (2 Cor. 13:13) where fellowship or 'koinodia' signifies a common participation, a togetherness, a community life. The faithful are bound to each other through their common sharing in Christ and in the Holy Ghost, but that which they have in common is precisely no "thing" or "it" but a "He" Christ and His Holy Spirit. It is just in this fact that resides the miraculous, the unique, the once-for-all nature of the church."²

3. Mennonite Brethren Confession of Faith. As we go into this analysis we should also hold before us the paragraph on page 20 of our Confession of Faith which describes the nature of the Church as follows:

The characteristics of the true church are: the fruits of conversion and of the right faith in Jesus Christ revealed in a life of sanctification according to the teaching of Christ and His apostles; the diligent searching of the Scriptures and the preaching of the pure gospel in all the world; practice of the holy ordinances of Christ which are baptism and the Lord's supper, the free confession of God and Jesus Christ before all men; fervent brotherly love, fellowship and submission among themselves and love of their neighbors, diligence to uphold the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace; taking up the cross in following Jesus; watching with prayer and supplication and thanksgiving for all men, and the prayerful and joyful waiting for the coming of the Lord and the establishment of His kingdom.

With these preliminary observations in mind let us now attempt brief summaries of major factors which constitute the nature of the Church.

I. THE CHURCH IS THE GATHERING TOGETHER OF BAPTIZED BELIEVERS

"For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20), said Jesus. When the Church made its historical emergence at Pentecost and was baptized in the Spirit, "they were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1). The Pentecost experience was a group experience. Christ baptized the Church as a body. The first Church "continued stedfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers . . . and all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2:42f). It is clear then that the Church is first of all the assembly of God's people. The Church fellowship is the biblical expression of personal Christian experience. Dr. Harold Tribble says, "the church is the group expression of Christian experience."³

What was the nature of the people who gathered as a Church? Luke tells us that the Lord added to the church daily such as should (or were being) be saved."

2. Quoted in Believers' Church, p. 59.

3. Tribble, Our Doctrines, p. 132.

Then we read in Acts 2:41, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." In our Confession of Faith we read on page 19, "The church of Christ is composed of all that through true faith in Jesus Christ and through obedience to the Gospel have separated themselves from the world and have their fellowship in the Holy Spirit with God the Father and Jesus Christ their only mediator."

By way of caution we should note two modern trends: 1) The "invisible" church. Although all believers are united in a spiritual and eternal fellowship to which we shall later refer, the New Testament speaks of the Church as basically the visible local fellowship. "The Concept of the invisible church actually is not Scriptural, it is never used in the New Testament, and is in fact the creation of the Reformers. The Anabaptist rejected it, and Mennonites of today would do well to follow them rather than the Reformers or the modern fundamentalists."⁴ An emphasis on the invisible Church has often led to the lowering of standards for the organized Church. Sometimes the unwise use of this term has led some converted people to shun baptism and church membership, resting themselves in the idea that they have become members of the invisible Church. The New Testament Church is fundamentally the local visible Church fellowship to which the Lord added daily such as should be saved.

2) Receiving members: The second caution is on receiving into membership such as the Lord has not added. We are not left in doubt as to who became a member of the New Testament Church fellowship. They were those "who received the word," they were those who "were born of God," they were those "who were new creatures," they were those who "were reconciled unto God." We gather then that these who belonged to the Church were those who had a personal experience in Christ, who were baptized, and who had dedicated themselves to be followers of Christ. In the second century of Christianity we notice a lack of insistence upon this genuine transforming spiritual experience which led to moralism and legalism in the Church.

Today we face two dangers: (a) On the one hand is traditionalism in which baptism and church membership are initiated upon certain age youth, with little regard to personal experience. This was the practice of the Mennonite Church from which the Mennonite Brethren went out in 1860. (b) On the other hand is the danger of pushing downward the age of baptism into early childhood, where social pressure and emotional evangelism may also destroy the New Testament Church concept. Contrary to the practice of the Reformers Luther and Calvin the New Testament Church is a fellowship of true believers only. Luther said that in the Church are tares and wheat. However, the New Testament Church (as Anabaptists conceived it) could not consist of both tares and wheat. The tares are in the field of the world. The state should not pull up the tares, but the Church should consist only of true wheat.

II. THE CHURCH IS A UNITED BODY OF BELIEVERS

The unity in the Church of Jesus Christ may be seen in three relationships:

1. The unity in the local congregation. Unity in the Church is illustrated variously in the Scriptures: The Church is united like a body (1 Cor. 12) which has many members, yet is one united whole. The Church is united like a building where each stone, like each member, is built harmoniously into a united structure. "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:19-22). The Church is united like a bride is united with her husband (Eph. 5 and Rev. 21:3). This unity of believers is a creation of God. We are not asked to create unity, but we are asked to keep the unity of the spirit. "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). When there is not

4. Bender, "The New Testament Doctrine of the Church," Christian Ministry, Jan.-Mar. 1955, p. 13.

unity in the Church it is not that the Church has lost its unity, but that individual members have lost the vision of it. When the Spirit of God enters the life of an individual the spirit unites this person deeply with the body of Christ. "For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13). There is mutual concern among the members, one for the other. "That there be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it, or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:25-26). Divisions or factions in the Church are not always due to differences of opinions on doctrine, but often the cause of division is merely over the fact that the members do not care enough one for the other.

2. The Unity of the Church is further seen in the relationship that exists between local congregations. The word Church in the New Testament is sometimes used in the plural referring to several congregations, or Churches (2 Cor. 11:8,28 and 1 Thess. 2:14, Acts 9:31). Among local Churches also there is manifested a united spirit and effort. While local Churches were distinct bodies of believers, working together as a complete organization, they were, however, not absolutely independent. The decision and advice of the conference of Christians in Acts 15, for example, was sent to all the Churches that these Jerusalem resolutions might guide them in the matters at hand. The apostle Paul never separated one Church from another in his thinking. Whenever he wrote to one Church, his letters became applicable to all the Churches. "And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the Church at Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea" (Col. 4:16). The local Church, therefore, as it remains a full organization in itself is yet a part of the total brotherhood and cannot live separately from the other Churches. Brother A. H. Unruh says, "In the Scripture we learn that the Churches moved forward unitedly. The Scripture does not teach the absolute independence of the local Church."⁵ The basic relationship of a local congregation to a conference of Churches is, therefore, this: the local Church considers itself a part of the whole body and it will carefully examine all decisions made by the conference of which it is a part. These decisions it will acknowledge and voluntarily accept as a guide for its practices. Brother A. H. Unruh says further, "The Conference is not so much a legislative body as an advisory body, and no resolutions become truly binding until the local Church in body accepts in the spirit of love and brotherhood the decisions which the leading brethren have made at the conference."⁶ This is the real test of unity! Basically the Churches of a conference are not bound into an ecclesiastical machinery, but are united in a bond of fellowship which springs from the Spirit of God. John Bright says, "The New Testament Church, it hardly needs to be stressed, was one Church. It knew nothing of Churches. The little Churches scattered over the empire from Jerusalem to Rome and back were bound together by no formal ecclesiastical organization, but they knew themselves to be one body in Christ."⁷

3. The unity of the Church is also evident in its relationship with the total Body of Christ. The word Church is also used in the New Testament as meaning the whole Body. "Upon this rock I will build my Church" (Matt. 16:18). "And the Lord added to the Church daily," not merely to the Church at Jerusalem, but to the Body. Paul persecuted the Church, not merely the saints at Jerusalem, but through them, the whole. We find the word used in this total sense also in Eph. 1:22; 5:23-24; 1 Tim. 3:5, etc. We cannot justly shut ourselves off from other true believers in other denominations. Yea, in this divided world, Christians should seek the love and unity that ties them together into a united witness for Christ. It must be the prayer and hope of the Church, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21).

5. Unruh, A. H., Christian Leader, Sept. 15, 1955, pp. 4-5.

6. Ibid.

7. Bright, The Kingdom of God, p. 264.

The oneness of the Church in Christ addresses itself to strong individualism on one hand and broad ecumenicalism on the other. The stiff necked brother is reminded to "prefer one another," the independent autonomous local Church is reminded there is "one body," the broad ecumenicist is warned that only the Lord adds to the body such as are being saved!

Let it be repeated that the unity of the body is a creation of the Holy Spirit. There is one body! Endeavor to keep the unity of the spirit! This unity then is a reality in the life of each believer. It is based upon a spiritual experience and becomes for him a glad togetherness with fellow Christians. We will know in spirit with whom we are one in Christ! Its base is not cultural unity or historical unity; for then it becomes a Volkskirche, and is no longer a "gemeinde." It is a unity created by the spirit of God, which spirit we recognize in each other as Christians.

III. THE CHURCH IS A BROTHERHOOD OF BELIEVERS

One cannot honestly love God and not love his brother. It is truly amazing how closely the Bible brings love of God and love of men together. "Hereby shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35). "He that hateth his brother is in darkness" (1 John 2:11). "Hereby perceive we the love of God because he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).

The world in apostolic times said of the Christians, "Behold how they love one another." Everett Cattell says, "Not all evangelicals have grasped the fact that an honest survey of the New Testament shows the emphasis on love and fellowship among brethren to be heavier than that upon separation."⁸ The Church is a community of love and is so recognized by the world (John 13:35). True believers have received through the love of God love for other men. ". . . the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). This fellowship of love (agape=divine love) is to be distinguished from the fellowship of persons who have come to "like" one another and to enjoy each other's company. This is the fellowship of "agape," the miraculous redeeming love of God shed abroad in human hearts through the Spirit. "This love is founded on congeniality, not sameness of views, feelings, affections, and of objects of interest and pursuit, but founded rather on relationship."⁹

We now live in a day of severe individualism where each one cares only for himself. This modern individualism has made inroads into the Churches. It is of great significance that in this discussion we review the importance of this characteristic of the true Church. In the body of Christ Christians care one for the other. Paul says that divisions (schism) come into the body, because the members do not care enough one for the other. "That there be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care one for another" (1 Cor. 12:25). This care one for another is not only spiritual interest in the other brother, but interest in his total welfare, be it spiritual, economic or social. The Anabaptist movement brought back much of this spirit of brotherhood which was lost to the Church of the Middle Ages. "Now, then, the central idea of Anabaptism, the real dynamite in the age of Reformation, as I see it, was this, that one cannot find salvation without caring for his brother, that this "brother" actually matters in the personal life.... This interdependence of men gives life and salvation a new meaning."¹⁰ It needs to be noted that this emphasis has also returned to us a clearer vision of the fact that each church member is involved in Christian service. It tells us that the body works as one; that the total brotherhood is to be considered in its operation and decisions. John A. Toews in a thesis, The Anabaptist Concept of the Church, makes this observation, "The Anabaptists conceived of the church as a

8. Cattell, "Living in a Tension," Eternity, April, 1958, p. 16.

9. Hodge, "The Unity of the Church," Christianity Today, May 26, 1958, p. 24.

10. Littell, "The Anabaptist Concept of the Church," The Recovery of the Anabaptist Vision, p. 123.

brotherhood in which there are no classes, no clergy and laity, no artificial distinctions, but a fellowship of equals. The New Testament designation of Brother and Sister were revised and given a new and deeper meaning. These terms indicated to them that members of the Church were closely bound together by ties of love and mutual concern and that they should act toward each other as members of a great family of whom God is the Father."

Since our Mennonite Brethren Churches are now going into the pastoral system of Church leadership we need to sound a note of caution. Too readily the minister is considered purely a professional leader, rather than a servant of the congregation leading others into service (Eph. 4:11-12). Too readily the minister is expected to do the work while fewer and fewer layman are drawn into participation of the church work as well as into the teaching and preaching ministry. Although the pastoral system is upon us, we must not overlook the urgent necessity of examining this system in the light of the New Testament Church as a brotherhood of believers. The pastoral system need not rob us of the spirit of brotherhood, but it surely can. A further warning would emphasize the danger of the congregation's leaning too heavily upon the pastor and upon his decisions, rather than feeling individual responsibility, sensing the leadership of the Holy Spirit in the congregation and listening to the decision of the brotherhood as a body.

IV. THE CHURCH IS A DISCIPLINED FELLOWSHIP OF BELIEVERS

The disciplined Church which the New Testament pictures to us may be analyzed by seeing first the self discipline of the member to holiness, and secondly, by seeing the mutual discipline of the members.

1. Self-discipline of the members to a holy life is the call of the Christian. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). In the epistles there are abundant statements to the effect that a Christian is not only called to salvation, but he is also called to a holy life, called to be a follower of Jesus. "For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:8-10). "I . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. 4:1). One gathers quite readily that the New Testament depicts the Church as being composed of those individuals who have not only accepted salvation in Christ, but who have unreservedly taken up the cross and have dedicated themselves to be followers of Christ. In the days of our forefathers there was a term applied to Christians which was indeed meaningful, "Nachfolger Christi." A Christian was conceded to be not only one who was saved, but one who had decided to be a "follower." This meant that the convert was pledged to life with Christ as well as being saved in Christ. This was also the emphasis of our forefathers in the Anabaptist movement, a movement which led Christians out of a dead formal Church into a revival of New Testament Church life. J. Lawrence Burkholder writes, "The uniqueness of Anabaptism lies in its conviction that Christianity is much more than reflection upon Christ as the divine Being who has invaded time, and it is more than the appropriation of the benefits of the divine drama of the cross. Christianity is the concrete and realistic imitation of Christ's life and work in the context of the kingdom of God."¹¹ Hans Denk once said, "Christum vermag niemand wahrlich zu erkennen,

11. Burkholder, Recovery of Anabaptist Vision, p. 137.

es sei denn, dass er Ihm nachfolge im Leben." We must therefore hold firmly in view this disciplined life unto holiness which the Bible pictures to us as an integral part of the call to discipleship. While this may seem to be self-evident, it is just in this area that the Church is becoming weaker. The battleground on which the Church finds itself today is not only on the ground of the doctrines, but on the ground of the separated life, the life of holiness and the life of discipleship. It ought to be a deep concern of ours whether or not we in our Churches have a New Testament vision of Christian discipleship, or whether we have lost the vision of the "Nachfolger" and have become merely Christians in profession but not in practice. This is, to be sure, one of the most urgent issues before us.

2. Mutual discipline of the members in the church is also clearly enjoined by Scripture. As we are called to self-discipline, so we are also called to discipline one another. "Brethren if a man be overtaken in a fault ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). "Confess your faults one to another that ye may be healed" (James 5:16). There is also the classic outline of Church discipline in Matthew 18:15-19 which Jesus has given us. This is not a discussion of Church discipline in full, however, we must enumerate the principles by which the mutual discipline in the Church is governed.¹²

- a) The basic purpose of Church discipline is to teach, to train and to bring up the membership into maturity of faith. The root meaning of the word discipline is: to train, to convert to doctrines and principles.
- b) The basic aim and objective of disciplinary action is to redeem the erring brother. It is not so much a punishment, but a redemptive motive that is involved (Gal. 6:1 and Matt. 18:15-19).
- c) The areas of corrective discipline are:
 - (1) Broken fellowship and unforgiveness (Matt. 18:15-19).
 - (2) Unbelief and doctrinal error (1 Tim. 6:3-5; Rom. 16:17).
 - (3) Trouble-making, due to the living of an ill-ordered life, to making of strife, etc. (2 Thess. 3:6-15).
 - (4) Wickedness, immorality (1 Cor. 5:1-13).
- d) The power of Church discipline is vested in the membership of the Church and in their mutual concern for each other (Matt. 18:15-19). Note carefully that discipline in the Church is the responsibility of every member. This is what Matthew 18 teaches us. The offended brother goes first, then two brethren go, then the church deals with the case, if necessary. What has happened in our day is that we have skipped "the brother" and the "two brethren" and have set up a "big-stick" system whereby a delegated body in the Church is sent to the brother to correct him. By so doing we have broken the power and the bond of Christian fellowship. "Historically, the trend has been to shift the responsibility of restoring, as well as restraining individuals, to a delegated body or the leadership of the congregation or conference. This is obviously a concession to the spiritual ineptitude of the local fellowship as a whole."¹³

It may be that by entering into the pastoral system of Church leadership we have permitted the members of the Church to delegate to the paid ministry duties

12. For a fuller discussion on church discipline, see paper by Frank C. Peters, "Re-thinking Church Discipline," (Ministers-Deacons Conference, Okeene, Oklahoma, August 1-3, 1955) and Jacob J. Toews, "Church Discipline," (Ministers-Deacons Conference, Ebenfeld, October 14-16, 1948).

13. Friesen, "Where Do We Begin," Studies in Church Discipline, p. 129.

which belong only to the fellowship as a whole. "With due regard for the lofty traditions of the Christian ministry it must be said that when authority for discipline has been vested in official leadership rather than the local brotherhood violence has been done to the Church as well as to the ministry. In discipline it is never the minister or elder alone who acts but the entire brotherhood."¹⁴ In general one can observe that we have rushed into the new paid ministry system of leadership before the people in the pew were actually ready for it. At least the current situation points up great lack of understanding as to what the brotherhood actually is and what its collective responsibilities are.

- e) Church discipline, if ineffective in its effort to restore a fallen brother, is to lead the Church to excommunicate such a member. This is the clear teaching of Matthew 18:16-18, 1 Cor. 5:5-7, and Matthew 16:19. Christ as well as the authors of the epistles have vested in the fellowship the authority to excommunicate members. The sobering fact about this is that such an act actually commits the sinning and unrepentant brother to Satan (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Tim. 1:20). Jesus also said what the Church binds on earth is bound in heaven, whatever the Church looses is loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:19). These are hard words, who can hear them? We find it difficult these days to actually believe this, much less to practice it. Is this lack due to the spiritual lethargy and weakness in the Church? Is it due to the fact that we no longer understand the true nature of the Church? How quickly membership in the Church is handled merely as membership in an organization! We take in and we dismiss members as if the church were a club into which one enters at will and which one leaves at will. All too few of us as members of the brotherhood realize the true nature of this act of excommunication and how few of us really believe that eternal matters are at stake!

Indeed do we lament with A. W. Tozer, "The greatest proof of our weakness these days is that there is no longer anything terrible or mysterious about us. The Church has been explained--the surest evidence of her fall. We now have little that cannot be accounted for by psychology and statistics. In that early Church they met together on Solomon's porch, and so great was the sense of God's presence that "no man durst join himself to them." The world saw fire in that bush and stood back in fear; but no one is afraid of ashes. Today they dare come as close as they please. They even slap the professed bride of Christ on the back and get coarsely familiar. If we ever again impress unsaved men with a wholesome fear of the supernatural we must have once the dignity of the Holy Spirit; we must know again that awe-inspiring mystery which comes upon men and Churches when they are full of power of God."¹⁵

V. THE CHURCH IS A WITNESSING FELLOWSHIP

1. The mission of the Church in this world is given first in the words of our Lord when He said, ". . . ye shall be witnesses unto me." Christians were to testify of what they had heard and seen. It was basically a mission of testimony to which the Church was called. Set over against a non-Christian world, the Church was to act in the world, but not be a part of it. Said Jesus, "Behold I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves" (Matt. 10:16; Luke 10:3). In Jesus prayer of John 17 we read, "As thou has sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world" (John 17:16). Again our Lord said, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). Our Lord has clearly outlined the mission for which the Church has been founded. It is through the Church that the world shall be evangelized. This was established at Pentecost when the Church was launched to sail out to the open seas of the world, when the Church was baptized in the spirit, when the Church was

¹⁴. Ibid.

¹⁵. Tozer, Paths to Power, p. 6.

given divine accreditation as God's agency in this world. Paul clearly states that it is through the Church that the gospel is to be made known, "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph. 3:10).

2. The Mission of the Church found various avenues of expression. Primarily it was a ministry of a) Teaching, b) Preaching, c) Serving. We read of the apostles that they "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42). Teaching addresses itself more to the believer with the purpose of indoctrination. Preaching addresses itself more to the unsaved, to the problem of sin, and to the purpose of the salvation of the individual.¹⁶ Service found expression in helping the widows and the poor (Acts 6; James 1:27). "As we have therefore opportunity let us do good unto all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith" (Gal. 6:10). Erland Waltner summarizes the mission of the Church as follows: "In fulfilling its function the biblical Church is, in short, the Church of the Great Commission--witnessing (Acts 1:8), evangelizing (Acts 4:20), worshipping (Acts 2:47), praying (Acts 4:24), learning and teaching (Acts 2:42, assembling (Acts 2:46), admonishing one another (Heb. 10:24-25), ministering in love to each other (Acts 4:34) and to the outside world (Gal. 6:10), thus also fulfilling responsibilities to society and to the state (Rom. 13:1-7, 1 Peter 2:13-17) as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16).¹⁷

So the Church went forth into the world. Believers were convinced of the validity of the message, they were convinced that they had entered into the eternal kingdom that would not be shaken, they were convinced that the crucified and risen Christ was and eternally would be Lord of Lords and King of Kings. "We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). The Church which Jesus founded is like the re-incarnation of the risen Lord Himself.

16. For further analysis of New Testament "Teaching" and "Preaching" see Smart, The Teaching Ministry of the Church, p. 19-23.

17. Believers' Church, p. 71.

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Cattell, Everett L., "Living in A Tension," Eternity, April, 1958.

Hodge, Charles, "The Unity of the Church," Christianity Today, May 26, 1958.

Peters, F. C., "Is the Mennonite Church a 'Volkskirche'?" The Voice, March-April, 1958.

Symposium, "The Body Christ Heads," Christianity Today, August 19, 1957.

Unruh, A. H., "The Working Relationship of the Local Church in the Conference," The Christian Leader, September 15, 1955.

SUPPLEMENT, BY THE FINDINGS COMMITTEE, ON THE PAPER

"THE SCRIPTURAL DEFINITION OF THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH"

NOTE 1 - To the end of point 1 on page 1 add:

The need for this study is also emphasized by such present-day tendencies as disloyalty to the church by its members, taking church membership too lightly, and other similar tendencies in which there is failure to emphasize sufficiently the Biblical teaching that Christianity is a brotherhood and fellowship which implies church membership.

NOTE 2 - Add to line 10 of point 2 following the statement "the so-called 'invisible church'" the following and delete the balance of the paragraph:

it has rather a two-fold reference meaning (1) "the called out ones" on the basis of the Greek word "ekklesia" which is derived from ek -- "out of" and kaleo -- "to call;" and (2) the idea of people being gathered together. The basic thought thus stresses "the ones called out" and also "the ones called together."

NOTE 3 - In the first paragraph on page 2 the following qualifying note should be added in parenthesis following the term "community life":

(We do not believe that this refers to mere social community life but rather to spiritual community life.)

NOTE 4 - In the first paragraph under point I, page 2, the statement "The Pentecost experience was a group experience" should be amended to read:

Pentecost was a group experience in the sense of establishing the Church. At the same time the Holy Spirit came upon each believer individually (Acts 2:1-4).

NOTE 5 - The last sentence of the second paragraph on page 3 should read:

The New Testament Church is fundamentally the visible Church fellowship to which "the Lord added... daily such as should be saved."

NOTE 6 - The sentence beginning at the bottom of page 3 should read:

When there is disunity in the Church it is not that the Church has lost its organic unity, but that individual members have lost the spiritual qualifications or essentials for the expression of this unity.

NOTE 7 - Regarding the quotation from Cattell in the second paragraph under point III, page 5:

We understand such Scriptures as 1 Tim. 1:5 and 1 Peter 1:22 and others to indicate that love of and fellowship with the brethren is the expression of a separated life. Since the separated life must come before there can be expression of it, we would not want to minimize its importance in any way.

NOTE 8 - The closing quotation of the fourth paragraph on page 5 should be deleted.

NOTE 9 - Regarding the quotation from Littell in the fifth paragraph on page 5 we would propose that the entire quotation be deleted and that the remainder of the paragraph be retained as it is without the quotation.

NOTE 10 - On page 7 point 2 a) should read:

The basic meaning of church discipline is to teach . . .

NOTE 11 - On page 7 point 2 c) (1) should read:
Broken fellowship and impenitence (Matt. 18:15-19).

NOTE 12 - To the first paragraph of point e) on page 8 should be added:

Though it is a serious truth which is often too little realized that one who is excommunicated is actually put out of the fellowship of the saints, we do not understand on the basis of Scripture that it is necessarily a committing to Satan in every instance. Some believe that the commital to Satan was an apostolic power according to 2 Cor. 13:10 and that this is no longer the prerogative of the Church. Excommunication is a putting away of and separation from the sinning brother (1 Cor. 5:11-13), yet the underlying motive is always to be the restoration of the erring one, and it is in that attitude that we are to regard him. 2 Thess. 3:14-15: "And if any man obey not our word of this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." Galatians 6:1.