

Various New Testament Doctrines of the Church

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A FEW years ago a student who was a member of one of the churches that claimed to be a New Testament church chose to present a seminar paper on "The New Testament Church." In preparing his paper in addition to reading the New Testament he studied a number of scholarly books. As a result, he prefaced his reading of the paper to the seminar by saying that he had changed his topic from the singular to the plural, to "The New Testament Churches." This shows the inherent dangers in reading scholarly books.

A study of the New Testament and other early Christian churches could be made on the basis of organization, clergy, liturgy and worship, baptism and the Eucharist, and the like. In fact, I originally prepared a paper for this colloquium following this outline. However, I discarded it in favor of the present one which considers more especially the doctrines of the church as reflected in the New Testament, with reference to New Testament Christologies and soteriologies.

There is a common belief that Jesus himself founded the Christian church when, as related in Matthew 16:18-19, he is reputed to have said to Peter: "You are Peter, and upon this rock I shall found my church. And the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. I will give unto you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatsoever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." It is generally recognized by New Testament scholars that this was an interpolation into the Gospel tradition by the ecclesiastically oriented author of Matthew, that it neither rep-

resents the words nor the intentions of Jesus. It has frequently been used as a proof text; it is well suited to such a use, because like an oracle from Delphi it is ambiguous, as the varied interpretations which have been given to it, testify.

Indeed, it is highly questionable that Jesus had an intention of founding an enduring religious organization that would be a separatist movement from Judaism, or even that he planned a continuing sect within Judaism, any more than John Wesley intended that his religious societies would become separated from the Church of England as a distinct sect. As I reconstruct the historical situation, he was continuing an unorganized prophetic movement wholly within Judaism inaugurated by his predecessor, John the Baptist, urging his fellow Jews to repent of their sins and to do God's will, in preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of God of Jewish expectations in their own time and in this present world age. It was this Kingdom, not the Christian church, which was of concern to him, and this was to be an enduring Kingdom, not a transitory one, with God, not Caesar, as King. Although political and military means were not to be used, the end result would be the removal, by some unexplained supernatural means, of Roman sovereignty in favor of God's; in other words, the Kingdom of God would be an ideal theocracy. He went to Jerusalem at the Passover season to proclaim his urgent message to the throngs of pious Jews who would be there. However (and here I find support from Cullmann), when Pontius Pilate, the Roman military governor learned that Jesus was proclaiming a kingdom other than that of Caesar's, he quickly and summarily sentenced him to death and had him crucified as a suspected revolutionary,

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which, in the final analysis, he actually was, although God, not Jewish patriots, would effect the change.

At first his immediate followers were filled with dismay and fear. However, as they became convinced—just how we are in no position to say—that their crucified master had been resurrected from the dead, had, in fact, appeared to them in his own person, and then, after an interval, had been taken up into heaven (as Elijah, Enoch, and Moses supposedly had been), they gathered together in Jerusalem (along with his brothers and some women to await his return in glory; for, so they apparently reasoned, even though he had not established his kingdom while on earth with them, he certainly would do so on his return from heaven, an event which was imminent. That during his last days Jesus himself had predicted an advent from heaven with might and power so as to overcome the forces of evil is a matter for speculation, if, indeed not for serious questioning.

Our sources for our knowledge of the so-called Jerusalem church, if, indeed, it was a church at first, are both scanty and tendentious. It appears that the twelve disciples and, strangely enough, James, one of the brothers of Jesus, were the accepted leaders. However, we do not know what kind of authority they exercised. Their intimate associations with Jesus during his lifetime on earth as well as appearances of the risen Jesus to them may well have accounted for their priority. They were all Aramaic speaking, Palestinian Jews. Other Jews of a similar background soon joined them, as well as some Hellenistic, Greek speaking Jews and some circumcised proselytes from the Greek world. Women as well as men were accepted in this company. It is evident from both Acts and Galatians that no uncircumcised Gentile would have been admitted into this thoroughly Jewish group. We do not know just how persons became members in the initial stages of the movement, if, indeed, the association was at first formal enough

to have members or requirements other than that they all be Jews. There is no evidence that they had any thought of separating from Judaism, none that they even considered the prospect of becoming a kind of Jewish sect. Indeed, it may be questioned that they thought that their association as such, if it were an organization, would be enduring, for the ardently expected second advent was at hand.

According to our information, they remained in Jerusalem, in the temple area, in fact, for the purpose of welcoming Jesus on his return from heaven. They worshiped in the temple, along with their fellow countrymen; they observed the commandments of Torah; quite likely they also attended synagogue services. They apparently urged other Jews to join them in their ardent expectation. According to Acts, some of them performed miracles, but this I would seriously question. In the main these Jews, in this loosely organized association, did not differ markedly from other Jews. To be sure, as was true of some, but by no means not of all Jews, they were messianists, believing in a messiah of one kind or another. They did differ from other Jews, however, in one important respect, for they identified the Messiah with Jesus of Nazareth who had been crucified by the Romans, and who, according to their convictions, had been raised from death, had appeared to them in person, and had been taken up into heaven, from whence he would return at any time to establish the Kingdom of God. There was no other messianic belief comparable to this, for the Jewish Messiah was not to suffer and die, nor would he have two advents. In this connection it is in order to quote a statement by Canon Streeter from his excellent book, **The Primitive Church**.

To understand the history of early Christianity we must begin by eliminating from our minds the traditional picture of the twelve Apostles sitting like a College of Cardinals,

systematizing the doctrine and superintending the organization of the Primitive Church. They had more urgent work to do; their duty was to call men to repent before it was too late. When the Lord might at any day return in glory, it was unprofitable to build up an organization about which the one certain thing was that it was never intended to last. (p. 42)

In some way or other the Messiah who had proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God which was to occur in his own lifetime in this world age, and who, so it was thought, would return from heaven very soon to accomplish what he had not succeeded in doing in his first advent, came to be thought of as an apocalyptic Messiah operating within the dualistic, eschatological, apocalyptic framework of reference. As such he would play an important role both in bringing this present evil world age of Satan's to a catastrophic end and in inaugurating God's new, perfect, and eternal world age, in which the righteous, that is, the faithful Christians would be eternally rewarded. Thus, the heavenly Jesus Christ becomes an apocalyptic messiah, similar in function to the heavenly Son of Man in certain apocalyptic sources of I Enoch. Just how this transformation occurred is a mystery. We know that there were definite evidences of apocalyptic thinking in the Judaism of the time. Perhaps some of the newly won Jewish adherents to the original group introduced this concept into the thinking of the followers of Jesus. To my mind it is unthinkable that Jesus entertained this dualistic concept.

Also, as time went on without Jesus appearing from heaven in his second advent as had been enthusiastically anticipated, the movement that centered in him began to become more stable, with some aspects of organization, with a certain aura of permanence. The movement had begun to spread out geographically, going beyond Jerusalem and Caesarea to various Gentile cities, such as Damascus, Antioch, Tarsus, and possibly Alexandria. It also began to

spread out culturally, beginning to attract Gentiles into the fellowship. These at first were required to become circumcised, that is, to become proselytes to Judaism, before being accepted in the group. This cultic requirement indicated that no break with Judaism had as yet occurred. But before long Gentiles were being accepted without the requirement of circumcision and observance of the Mosaic code of laws. The story of the baptism of the uncircumcised Roman centurion Cornelius may be apocryphal, but even so it teaches that it was now God's will that Gentiles could be accepted without first becoming Jews. Paul, as we know, waived this ethnic requirement. This permission actually marks the beginning of separation from Judaism proper, for it is a denial of the traditional cultic covenant between God and Israel. No such permission was allowed by the Qumran community, which continued to be a thoroughly Jewish sect, more observant, so its members thought, than the rest of Judaism. In this and in other basic features Qumran and early Christianity are not comparable.

Furthermore, according to Acts the followers of the way soon acquired a distinctive non-Jewish name, Christian, which, significantly enough, was based upon the Greek equivalent for messiah, the anointed one, thus testifying to the transition from the Jewish world to the Gentile world that was rapidly taking place, so that by the end of the century relatively few Christians were of Jewish origin. Furthermore, the Christians were practicing certain distinctive cultic rites, which, if not sacraments originally indeed became such. One, for new members, was baptism by water, and at times the spirit as well, at first, apparently, in the name of Jesus, but by the turn of the century in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Was this originally a sacrament, or was it similar to the baptism by John the Baptist which was a sign that the baptized person had truly repented of his sins, and had determined to do

God's will, a feature that necessitated some explanation for John's baptism of the "sinless" Jesus? In any event, as was true of John's baptism, it apparently was not, at first, preceded by a period of preparation, including fasting and instruction. Those who administered it were probably persons who had some acceptance as leaders among the Christians. However, was the Ananias who is reported to have baptized Paul a leader of the Christians of Damascus? We are unable to say yes or no to this. In addition, the early followers of Jesus had a sacred meal, the breaking of bread. Was this the Eucharist in which the words of institution which are found in I Corinthians and in the Synoptic Gospels were used? Or was it a simple meal of fellowship similar to the Jewish Kiddush, with the blessing of the cup and of the bread, which eventually was transformed into the Eucharist? Both Dr. Williams and I share the latter opinion. The formula presented in the Didache indicates that this may have been the case. Whatever it was, according to the Gospel description it was not the Passover meal with lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs as important features. Furthermore, it is strongly suggested that the equating of the wine with the blood of Jesus which was to be drunk was quite out of keeping with the food tabus of the Palestinian Jews. They not only were forbidden to partake of blood in their diet, but the very thought of drinking wine as a symbol of human (or divine) blood would have been most abhorrent, probably nauseating, to them.

Somehow, somewhere, sometime — greater precision than this is impossible — some basic changes occurred in this messianic movement which at first had been quite Jewish in nature so that it was becoming increasingly Hellenistic in its constituency. These Hellenists were of three kinds, Greek speaking Jews, such as Stephen, Barnabas, and Paul were; Gentiles who had become

Jews through the rite of circumcision; and uncircumcised Gentiles.

Furthermore, Christians had developed small, loosely organized enclaves known as churches. Since these were house churches, they must, perforce, have had a small number of members. Possibly one hundred members was a maximum. They were in part influenced by the synagogue. However, unlike the synagogue, women were admitted into full membership along with the men, a further instance of Hellenistic patterns. Their officials were in time named bishops, elders, and deacons, with at times, it would appear, no distinction being made between bishop and elder. In part the service of worship followed that of the synagogue; prayers, scripture reading, and a homily. However, Christians added the celebration of the Eucharist as a weekly feature. We also know that in some churches, at least, hymns were sung. Save as churches were under the direction of a missionary—founder, as in the case of Paul's churches, each local congregation was autonomous. To be sure, the church at Jerusalem was considered to be a seat of some kind of authority, but before long this authority was symbolic rather than actual.

Moreover, as a part of the transition from Judaism, Jesus the Christ, the Messiah, had also become Jesus the Lord, the Kyrios. This is far more than a linguistic change, a change in name only; indeed, it is a change in character, in function, which in its way was as significant as the abrogation of circumcision was, for it marked a change from a belief in a Messiah, a Jewish concept, to a belief in a savior-lord, a Hellenists pattern-of-religious thoughts.

This statement necessitates an excursus into a consideration of the basic features of the Hellenistic mystery religions, called so because the initiations into these cults were held in secret with the initiates termed "mystae." In the light of their basic appeal, the guarantee of a blessed immortality to the initiates, they might more descrip-

tively, be called "eternal life" religions. They all apparently originated in somewhat primitive times as vegetation or fertility cults, depending upon whether the people were mainly agricultural or pastoral in their pursuits. The seasonal cycle of plant growth and decay or the cycle of animal birth and death was reflected in the sacred story of the death and restoration to life of the god or goddess of the cult, or, in the case of Mithraism, the death of the primal bull, and the fertility resulting from this event. These cults at first had nothing to do with the death and then the rebirth of mankind, but in time this very significant modification was made.

Mankind normally was mortal. Man's usual destination after death was to Hades, in the underworld, from which there normally was no return. Hades, like the Hebrew Sheol, was a place of no return for the departed spirits who barely existed, and that was all. However, since the gods of these cults had triumphed over death and had been restored to life, there came to be a transfer of their triumph to mortals, who, like the gods whom they worshiped, might be restored to life after death, and guaranteed a blessed immortality with the gods. This blessed result might be obtained through initiation into the mysteries of one of these deities, in which the death and restoration of the god were either simulated or symbolized, or both, so that the mortal initiate was reborn as an immortal being. Moreover, through a mystical experience he might become mystically united with the immortal deity to whom he had been initiated. In murals of the Villa of Mysteries at Pompeii this union is depicted as a sacred marriage with the god Dionysus. At times the union with deity was reinforced by participation in a sacred meal. Paul, for example, told the Corinthians that they could not drink of the cup of the Lord and that of the pagan daimons (gods), that they could not partake of the table of the Lord and the table of these daimons. Some of the fathers of

the second century, well aware of the striking similarities between the Christian mystery and the pagan mysteries explained them away by averring that the pagan mysteries were devilish imitations of the true religion designed to deceive people and lead them astray. They failed to tell us why God permitted the devils to devise these demonic imitations, but we do not expect a Mormon to tell us why God permitted the crickets to devour their crops before sending the gulls. It is my firm belief that Paul reflects an acquaintance with the mystery religions, as do the authors of Ephesians and I Peter. Indeed, as Goodenough has been saying ever since he wrote the book, *By Light, Light*, some areas of Hellenistic Judaism had been affected in part by the mystery religion pattern. Paul and earlier converts from Hellenistic Judaism or Gentile proselytes may well have introduced the mystery concept into nascent Christianity.

In any event, for many a Christian Jesus became thought of as a dying, rising, savior Lord. Those who were baptized in his name (the Christian equivalent of a mystery initiation) died to sin and to mortality, and were reborn to a condition of sinlessness and immortality. Baptism was no longer just a religious rite symbolizing that the baptized person had repented of his sins; it was now a sacrament that by itself, or, as with Paul, along with justification by faith, effected a significant change in the recipient. Furthermore, the Christian not only was baptized in the name of Jesus, he was also baptized *into* Jesus, becoming mystically united with his savior Lord. He was in Christ and Christ was in him. The refusal of the early Christians to permit more than one baptism (Hermas, an exception, permitted two) testifies to the suggestion that it was the Christian rite of initiation.

The Christian's newly gained immortality and mystical union with his Lord were strengthened and renewed by repeated, apparently weekly, par-

participation in a sacred meal, the Eucharist. This was no longer just a fellowship meal, or a memorial meal. It had now become, and this as early as Paul's letters to the Corinthians, if not earlier, a theophagic, sacramental meal. This is stated most explicitly in John 6:54-56: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him." We need not wonder that Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, termed the Eucharist the medicine of immortality, for this is what it was thought to have been. It is significant that in addition to the weekly celebration of the Eucharist there was a baptismal Eucharist which was celebrated following this initiatory sacrament, for by this means the union of the initiate with his immortal Lord was made more evident.

Although there is no evidence of full blown gnosticism in primitive Christianity, nevertheless it was in process of development when some of the New Testament books were composed, in fact, some of the later books are in part refutations of certain features of Gnosticism, for example, the Gospel of John, I John, Jude, and the Pastorals. Consequently, a brief statement may well be made concerning the basic Gnostic belief. Actually, Gnosticism was a non-apocalyptic form of dualism, with two co-existent worlds that were quite different in their nature, and wholly incompatible one with the other. One was the world of matter, which was irrevocably evil, the other the world of spirit, which was eternally good. Man partook of this dual nature. His body, which was made of matter, was evil; his soul, pre-existent in heaven before becoming incarnate in a human body of flesh and blood, was good. The aim of the Gnostic was to find some release for his soul from the body which imprisoned it and degraded it, a temporal release while still living on the earth, and an eternal release when at death

the soul would leave corpse of matter and return to its original place in heaven. This release might be obtained through mystic rites, through the reception of a saving Gnosis, revealed by a redeemer, Jesus Christ, who had come to earth in a seeming body, and who would be able to show the Gnostic the way back to the heavenly realm of pure spirit. In some instances certain ascetic disciplines of sex and food were practiced in order to weaken the body, thereby facilitating the release of the soul. There was no need of a Messiah in Gnostic speculation; no place for a dying and rising savior Lord. In fact, the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, could not suffer death on the cross since he did not have a flesh and blood body. But there was a need for some means of instruction in the Gnostic way. This required a group of "initiates," so to speak, who could give the proper instruction to others.

What, then was the Christian church? This is a difficult question to answer, for there were varieties of Christian views concerning the church, depending upon a variety of beliefs and practices. The word that became normative as a designation of a congregation of Christian worshipers, *ecclesia*, is a Greek word, as, of course, is *synagogue*. It is possible that the primitive Aramaic speaking Christians did not use the Greek term. If so, the word itself implies a transition from the Palestinian Jewish world to the Hellenistic. It may also be significant that the Christians chose *ecclesia* instead of the word *synagogue*; only once does "*synagogue*" appear in the New Testament (and then somewhat questionably) as a description of a Christian assembly, in James 2:2. It is not impossible that the Christians chose the term *ecclesia*, rather than *synagogue*, when Christianity was becoming somewhat distinct from Judaism. Also, in addition to being applied to a single congregation it was also used as a designation of Christianity as a whole.

Initially, a Christian church (if we

may use both words anachronistically) consisted of a messianic congregation of men and women within Judaism who expected the immediate return from heaven of their crucified, resurrected and ascended master to establish the Kingdom of God which he had proclaimed while he was with them. This was more of a corporate expectation resembling the belief in the continuation of Israel than a personal, individualistic one. There is little or no evidence that any of its adherents believed that he had been transformed in some supernatural way from a state of personal mortality to that of personal immortality, that he, if he died, would be resurrected from the grave. In fact, the members did not necessarily need such a hope, for they ardently expected to be alive when Jesus Christ appeared in power and glory in his second advent. There is no evidence that any of them considered that he was mystically united to the ascended Jesus Christ who was at the right hand of God in heaven. In no way, it would seem, was the church a supernatural institution any more than the synagogue was. It was basically an assembly of those who believed that Jesus Christ was messiah, a fellowship, a brotherhood, a *koinonia*. It was not, in some mysterious way, the body of Christ, it had no cosmic significance. What about the righteous dead, both those Christians who had died before the second advent and the saints of the past? Would they be resurrected at the time of the coming of Jesus? Since there were Jews of the time who believed in the resurrection of the dead, it may be that the early Christians looked forward to some such restoration of the righteous dead so that they might have a share in the Kingdom. If so, this belief had not reached the Christians of Thessalonica by A.D. 50, for Paul had to assure them that "the dead in Christ" would be resurrected. But did this term "the dead in Christ" include those who had died before the **first** advent of Jesus Christ, the saint of the Old Testament

period. Paul does not answer this question which may not have been asked of him.

It is possible to write with more certainty about the concept of the church in the book of Revelation. The author writes to seven churches in Asia Minor. There is a certain supernatural element associated with them, for each one has a guardian angel. He does not consider them to be communities of saints, for he mixes strong criticism with praise in the opening letter corpus. The true members are those who will be steadfast unto death in the time of persecution. There is no evidence, either in the corpus of letters or in Revelation as a whole, of any special interest in either baptism or the Eucharist. The considerable amount of liturgy in the book is not the liturgy of heaven as the writer represents it to be, but, as Evelyn Underhill observed, it is a reflection of the liturgy of the churches in Asia Minor. However, the author has no great and abiding interest in these churches, for they will be of short duration, just three and a half years, indeed, of the author is to be taken literally. The author does, however, express a great interest in the resurrection, in two resurrections, in fact. First, with the second advent of Jesus there will be a resurrection of a favored group, the martyrs, who have been resting in heaven awaiting this glorious event. Then following the millennium there will be a general resurrection of the rest of the dead. The temporal earthly churches are not the real church. The real church is the eternal heavenly New Jerusalem which will come down to earth at the beginning of God's new world age. It is my belief that the author intended that its members would be the martyrs, and no one else. In any event, through their martyr death the martyred Christians are assured of a blessed immortality with God and with Christ. There are evidences of some kind of a belief in a mystical union with the heavenly Christ, for the New Jerusalem is represented as being his

bride. Regardless of the author's lavish use of the Old Testament, it is evident that the cleavage between Christianity and Judaism is complete. The Jews, in fact, are referred to as "the synagogue of Satan." Christianity as the new Israel has completely replaced it.

The so-called Johannine letters have a basically different view of the church from that of Revelation. The author is concerned with an earthly, not a heavenly church. The apocalyptic pattern of thinking is all but missing, as is the martyr motif. His basic interest is in correct belief and in the unity of the believers; he is strongly opposed to what he considers to be heresy and schism. Its members are reborn as children of God; as children of God they are without sin. They are to abide in Christ, that is, they are in mystical union with him. They are to exclude from their fellowship all those who believe that Jesus Christ had not been incarnate. These docetic heretics are labeled as anti-Christ, an epithet taken over from apocalyptic imagery. There is to be no schism among the true believers. They are to be obedient to their leadership and keep the commandments. There is to be no schism; instead, they are to love one another. Love, however, is related to obedience and to uniformity of belief. It is possible that I John was originally a homily delivered in connection with the love feast (agape). The concept of the church in the Johannine epistles is somewhat similar to that reflected in the prayer of John 17, where Jesus is said to have petitioned that his followers (that is, the church) might be one. As in the epistles, in John the Christian is reborn; however, in the Gospel this rebirth brings about eternal life rather than a life of sinlessness here on earth. Furthermore, in John, as we have noted in remarks about the Eucharist, the concept of mystical unity of the believer with the heavenly Christ is quite marked. This is expressly presented in the allegory of the vine and branches (chapter 15) which stresses the mystical union with Christ.

The allegory also symbolizes unity, for all believers are the branches of the same vine. The command to love one another is also stated in the allegory. I am convinced that this allegory of the grape vine has the Eucharist in mind, and possibly the eucharistic love feast as well. It is obvious from the prophecy after the event at the beginning of the 16th chapter, "they shall put you out of their synagogues," that the separation between Judaism and Christianity has already occurred.

More data concerning the nature and function of the church are found in Paul's letters. Although he frequently uses the word "church" in so far as we can judge from his letters he never calls its members "Christians." Since he had been associated with the church at Antioch where the word Christian, according to Acts, was first used, his disuse of the term is puzzling. Instead, in all of his letters save Galatians he calls the church members "saints," that is to say, the holy or consecrated ones. Paul considered that before becoming a Christian an individual was controlled by the forces of evil, including Satan and Sin personified, that his very body of flesh was inherently evil. Since the wages of sin is death, the unsaved person not only was sinful but he was also mortal. However, when he was justified by faith and baptized "into Christ Jesus," he died to sin and all of its consequences and became a new man in Christ Jesus, freed from the power of sin and death, freed from the lusts of the flesh, becoming a holy, immortal person. Furthermore, he was mystically united with Christ, he was in Christ and Christ was in him; his body was the temple of God, of the Holy Spirit. For the Gnostic the body of flesh was not only evil, but irredeemably so. Consequently, it was essential that the soul be freed from the evil body. It is my opinion that for Paul, although the body of flesh, was innately evil, it could be changed, that indeed the body of the Christian had been transformed, becoming the body of Christ, although ap-

pearing to be what it had formerly been. The Roman Catholic sacramental doctrine of transubstantiation in which the material elements of bread and wine become changed into the body of Christ without undergoing any visible change may serve as an illustrative analogy of Paul's view concerning the transformation of the body of flesh.

Since its members are holy, the church is a holy society. The church which is composed of holy persons who are bodily united with Christ is the body of Christ, who is its head. Since Paul believed in a cosmic Christ, to some extent, the church had cosmic significance. Logically, however, the church as an ongoing institution should have had little significance for Paul, for he expected that the end of this world age, signalized by the second advent of Jesus Christ, would occur momentarily. Then those who had died in Christ would rise from the dead, and they together with the Christians who are alive at his coming would share in the blessings of his reign, which would be followed by the blessings of the eternal reign of God himself. In my opinion only those who died in Christ would be raised from the dead, because their bodies, and their alone, were changed from mortal bodies to immortal.

Paul's letters reflect a church that was fairly well organized despite the nearness of the end of time. The leaders of the Jerusalem church were the titular heads of the church, but Paul was able to become co-equal with them, at least in so far as the Gentile mission was concerned. He himself, as missionary-founder, did his best to oversee the churches that he had founded, as well, perhaps, over some (Colossae, for example) which he had not personally founded. Each local church had its leadership. According to Paul the leaders were entitled to some support. Admission to membership was evidently through the experience called justification by faith and baptism; both were essential for salvation. For Paul cir-

cumcision was not only non-essential, it was forbidden for Gentile converts. There is no evidence that any preliminary preparation was required. Through the sacrament of the Eucharist, as previously noted, the Christian became more closely united with Christ. The Pauline churches were exclusive in that its members could not participate in the pagan rites, furthermore, although Paul in his missionary efforts worshiped in the synagogues, there is no evidence in his letters that the members of his churches continued to do so. In fact, most of them were of Gentile, not Jewish origin, and were uncircumcised. There was a certain amount of discipline; in one instance a sinful and disobedient member was tried and excommunicated by the church at Corinth. Paul, in fact, had previously handed him over to Satan so that, as he says, quite inconsistently, his soul might be saved.

Quite a number of the elements of Christian worship were evident in the Pauline church at Corinth, and presumable in others under his direction. There were prayers, the use of scripture, teaching, singing, prophesying, speaking with tongues (which Paul tried to curb), the celebration of the Eucharist, probably the love feast or agape, and a Sunday collection for the leaders at Jerusalem. In spite of Paul's eschatological hopes, his churches were prepared to become ongoing institutions. We are in no position to do more than to suggest that quite a number of non-Pauline churches were organized on similar lines.

In his views Paul has all but reconciled two basically different dualisms, the one, the dualism of flesh and spirit which became characteristic of Gnostic teachings, the other, the dualism of the apocalyptic hope where it is in essential agreement with the basic pattern of Revelation (see I Cor. 15:20-28). Furthermore, while he has retained a belief of Jesus Christ as an apocalyptic Messiah, at the same time he considers him to have been a dying, rising, and as-

cended Lord. He is obviously not concerned with corporate immortality; his deep and abiding interest is in the eternal salvation from sin and in the subsequent immortality of the individual. For Paul the church was a holy institution, composed of the saved, the holy persons, and they alone. Outside of the church there was no salvation, no freedom from sin and death, no assurance of a blessed immortality with Jesus Christ. But the church, holy though it was, was not an end in itself. Conceivably, as noted earlier, it would not survive this world age. But it was the custodian and/or purveyor of the means whereby the unsaved person could become saved. It is obvious that had Paul been satisfied merely to convert people to his gospel of salvation as he went as a missionary from city to city without organizing the converts into a church, the results of his efforts would have evaporated before long. Part of Paul's genius, like that of John Wesley, was the ability to make an effective organization of those who had associated themselves with him. One of the reasons for the disappearance of Gnosticism was that with the exception of Marcionism the Gnostic movements were apparently unorganized. This is why Marcionism became the *bête noire* of the Catholic Church of the second and third centuries.

The statement about the mutual relationships of husband and wife in the Haustafel in Colossians 3:18-19 has been re-written by the Paulinist author of Ephesians 5:22-33 as an allegory of Christ's mystical relationship between Christ and his church. As the husband is the head of the wife, so Christ is the head of the church; as the wife is to obey the husband, so the church is to obey Christ. Just how Christ is to be obeyed by the church is unclear unless this is taken to mean that the duly selected leaders are the representatives of Christ and as such should be obeyed. If this is so, then the leaders have a certain supernatural authority. Paul was concerned with establishing unity

in the church at Corinth, and probably in the other churches under his direction, but it is not clear that he was concerned about unity throughout the church-at-large. However, by the time Ephesians was written sectarianism had developed. Consequently, the author was concerned about the unity of Christianity as a whole, as he states in 5:4-7: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all." This passage, quite naturally, has become the proof text for ecumenicity today.

The Paulinist author of I Peter, who describes himself as an elder, not as an apostle, is like Paul in emphasizing rebirth through baptism. Indeed, it has been strongly suggested by commentators that the first part of this little book was originally a baptismal homily. Furthermore, through the sacrament of baptism with its rebirth, the Christians become both holy and immortal. These benefits are available through the church because Jesus Christ died upon the cross, because of the blood of the slain lamb. His death through which salvation is possible was known before the foundation of the world. The Christians are an elect race, a holy and royal priesthood, the people of God. But it does not appear to me that this means that they are the people of a covenant. Indeed, the word "covenant" does not occur in this work. Jesus Christ, it might be noted, is the chief Shepherd and Bishop of the flock, the earthly leaders are called elders, the term the writer, as noted previously, uses as his own signation.

Turning briefly to the concept of "covenant," two Old Testament covenants that of Abraham and that of Sinai, were apparently merged by Ezra. This merged covenant required on man's part the practice of the rite of circumcision and the observance of Torah, and on God's the fulfillment of certain promises to Israel as his elect

and chosen people. This, I believe, is basic to the Judaism of the present day. To be sure, Jeremiah emphasized "a new covenant written upon the heart" (Jer. 31:31-34), but this did not replace the other concept in the thinking of the Jews. The Jerusalem church, composed of Jews and circumcised Gentiles, and these alone, with its insistence upon circumcision and the observance of Torah no doubt thought of itself as a part of the covenant community of Israel as a whole. But Paul and other leaders of the Gentile Christian Church rejected both circumcision and the Mosaic works of the law, thereby abrogating the Jewish covenant relationship, thus preparing the way for complete separation of church and synagogue.

In general, the concept plays but a minor role in the New Testament books. This is in part due, I believe, to the emphasis by Christianity upon the individual rather than upon a nation, a people. It is used in the formula for the celebration of the Eucharist in the Synoptic Gospels and by Paul, but no one is quite sure of its meaning in this connection. It may be significant that there is no reference to the covenant idea in the Eucharistic formula in the *Didache*. In Galatians 4:21-28, Paul contrasts the old covenant of slavery with the new covenant of freedom, presumably a contrast between the covenant of Torah and that of the Spirit. But if it is a covenant of the Spirit, then the concept has been rather thoroughly individualized. The term is found in Hebrews, where as in Paul the new covenant abrogates the old, which was transitory and imperfect. Purdy, in commenting on Hebrews 8:6-13 in *The Interpreter's Bible*, observes that "the writer has to set covenant over against covenant, the new over against the old, in terms of the will of God. God's will is gracious and the promises of the new covenant are better, but it is God's will, not man's acceptance of it which dominates the thought." Purdy does raise an interesting problem. If, as stated in verse

7, the first covenant was not "faultless," and yet had been initiated by God, is God at fault in providing an imperfect covenant?

When the second coming of Jesus Christ had not occurred as had been expected by the first generation or so of Christians, the Christian church began to be organized on a more permanent basis. To be sure, the expectation was not given up, but for many the parousia was projected to some later time rather than in the immediate future. In explaining delay, the author of II Peter, quoting a proof text from Psalm 90:4, stated that his readers should know "that with the Lord one day is a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." Before the latest books of the New Testament were written the Catholic Church, a permanent institution, was taking form. Its apologists claimed that it was of divine origin, had been founded by Jesus Christ, who in turn had given authority, together with the correct doctrines, to the apostles. They founded churches in the main centers of the Roman Empire. They also selected and ordained Bishops as their successors, who in turn would appoint and ordain their successors. Consequently, there was an unbroken line of apostolic succession in the leadership, with the Bishops having apostolic authority, with the Bishops as the custodians and transmitters of the apostolic doctrines without corruption. Church orders with their ecclesiastical instructions and liturgies were written, but these claimed to be of apostolic origin: The *Didache*, or The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles; the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, the *Didascalis Apostolorum*; and the Apostolic Constitutions. Affirmations of faith were said to have been of apostolic origin, for example, one of the early creeds came to be known as the Apostles' Creed. And, of course, only books which were considered, rightly or wrongly, to have been written by apostles or members of the apostolic circle were accepted in the Christian scripture, the New Testa-

ment, which as a collection was the product of the Catholic Church.

There is a partial parallel to this apostolic concept of the church in the Pastoral Epistles, which, I believe, were written in the name of Paul around 150 A.D. as a response to Marcionism. Marcion claimed that his doctrines were basically derived from Paul, who had a revelation when he ascended to the third heaven which supplanted that given by Jesus to the Twelve. Accordingly, after discarding the Jewish Bible, the Old Testament, he produced the first Christian scripture, consisting of a Gospel (similar to Luke) and a collection of Paul's letters which some one had conveniently prepared and published some years earlier.

Some ingenious, more orthodox Christians decided to refute Marcion in the name of Paul. Accordingly, he wrote I-II Timothy and Titus, ascribing them to Paul. In these, Paul is represented as transmitting the true, sound Christian doctrines to his trusted assistants, Timothy and Titus. They, in turn, are to appoint Bishops and/or Elders, to whom these doctrines will be transmitted, and they will do likewise to their successors. Most of the doctrines that are to be transmitted are, as is true of the affirmations of the Apostles' Creed, refutations of the basic beliefs

of Marcionism. Accordingly, the writer was establishing an apostolic church, but with the line of succession originating with Paul, not with the Twelve, not with Peter. It must be obvious to any reader of Paul's actual letters that he would have never thought of establishing such a line of succession to serve a continuing church. The effectiveness of this ingenious example of pseudographic writing in combating Marcionism is evidenced by the inclusion of these so-called Pastoral Epistles in the Catholic canon of the New Testament by the end of the second century, with their Pauline authorship unquestioned.

This paper is quite obviously barely an introduction to a complex subject. Had the early Christians been enough concerned about the doctrine of the church to have written treatises on the subject and had these hypothetical treatises been preserved to our time, this paper would be unnecessary. As it is, deductions have been made from what is extant in the New Testament and other early Christian writings which treat the doctrine of the church in incidental fashion, if at all. But, perhaps, enough evidence has been presented to show that there was no New Testament doctrine of the Christian Church. Instead, a variety of views, not wholly consistent with one another, were entertained.

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