

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>The Nicene Creed</b>		Pastor/Teacher
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### ONE HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH (Part 2)

“Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint” (Proverbs 29:18, KJV). This verse has become one of the major building blocks in the seeker-driven school of church growth. Churches are urged to discover a vision for growth. This involves, among other things, finding a ministry model that will enable each individual church to reach its goal. These goals, as one highly-respected church-growth consultant has openly stated, must be supported by pragmatic measures that in the final analysis govern the whole enterprise.<sup>1</sup> On the surface, the appeal to Proverbs 29:18 might seem valid, but a closer examination of the passage reveals otherwise. Simply checking some different translations will show that the word “vision” actually means “revelation.”<sup>2</sup> The text is speaking not of our developing a vision for the future, but of responding in obedience to Scripture. Sad to say, much of the church growth preoccupation with developing a vision and ministry model for numerical growth comes directly from Wall Street. The church growth crowd readily admits that they have borrowed freely from the marketing mentality when developing a strategy for growth.<sup>3</sup> Is this what we need? In Acts 2:42 we read that the early church continually devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. What gripped the apostolic church was not a vision of what they could become, but a compelling message that focused their attention on the Lord Jesus Christ. We find ourselves in this century in the vise-grip of a culture that is controlled by the forces of modernization. The effects this has had on churches has been, to put it mildly, revolutionary. Churches have become program-oriented. Pastors appear as CEO managerial psychologists. The prototype of today’s mega-church is the modern corporation with charts and graphs of market research and high-profile personalities at the helm. Going to church becomes a spectator sport – easy access is essential as well as convenient parking with a warm greeting at the door and a comfortable theater-type seat. Relax and enjoy the program. The service is high energy, high impact and fast paced. The sermon is easy to listen to, non-threatening and short. Is this the kind of thing David prayed for in Psalm 27? Hardly. David longed for having a God-centered vision of faith and life.

In the movie *Field of Dreams*, Kevin Costner plays a young Iowa corn farmer who hears a voice telling him, “If you build it, he will come.” Building has always been part of the American make-up. Yankee know-how is woven into the fabric of our society. This urge to success, to launch out into new ventures, is also how many Evangelicals go about building churches and empires. The Apostle in 1 Corinthians 3 tells us something entirely different. This passage acknowledges that from beginning to end the work of the people of God is God’s work. We must likewise avoid falling into a Martha syndrome (cf. Luke 10:38-41). A church can become a beehive of activity and to all outward appearances be considered a thriving and growing church. But appearances can be deceptive (cf. Revelation 3:14-22 and the church at Laodicea). The church today, as always, must resist the agenda of a culture that imposes on people a notion of success that is more conducive to the business world and the marketplace than to the household of faith. It is common to hear advice that runs along the following lines: “We need to get people excited about the church. We need to get them active and organized in some worthwhile endeavor – a new building program or outreach strategy – but we need to do something!” What we really need is a glimpse of the glory of Christ. We need a passion that comes from knowing Christ. We need the fellowship of believers who share that passion. When John is confronted with the glory of Christ, he falls down in worship.

Note this: Christ's appearance to John speaks of righteousness and redemption. Christ's character portrays holiness and purity. Christ's messages reveal His kingly and priestly authority. And this produces worship – for worship acknowledges the glory and power and majesty of God. Ultimately, as Doug Webster reminds us, “the true end of worship is to know God personally”<sup>4</sup> (cf. John 17:3; Psalm 27:8; 31:16; 80:3). This kind of worship does away with the kind of apathy and indifference that often characterizes our worship.

- I. **THE CHURCH IS ONE (Ephesians 4:4-6).** The Apostle's point is *not* based on how well individual Christians get along with one another (see Philippians 4:2 where two prominent women evidently had personal issues between them). The Church's oneness is grounded in the acts of the Triune God. In the trinitarian being of God the Church also discovers its deepest unity.<sup>5</sup> In John 17:21, Jesus prayed for this unity, and Christ's prayers never fail.
  
- II. **THE CHURCH IS HOLY.** What does *holy* signify? William Perkins (1558-1602) writes, “That the church is holy, it appears by Peter, which calls it *an holy nation, and a chosen people* [1 Peter 2:9], and by St. John, who calls it *the holy city* [Rev. 11:2]. And it is so called that it may be distinguished from the false church, which is termed in Scriptures *the synagogue of Satan* [2:9; 3:9] and the *malignant church* [Ps. 26:5]. Now, this holiness of the church is nothing else but a created quality in every true member thereof, whereby the image of God, which was lost by the fall of Adam, is again renewed and restored. The author of it is God by His word and Spirit by little and little abolishing the corruption of sin and sanctifying us throughout, as Christ says, *Father, sanctify them in thy word, thy word is truth* [John 17:17]. And holiness must be conceived to be in the church on this manner: it is perfect in the church triumphant, and it is only begun in the church militant in this life, and that for special cause – that we might give all glory to God [1 Tim. 1:17]; that we might not be high-minded [Rom. 11:20]; that we might work out our salvation with fear and trembling [Phil. 2:12]; that we might deny ourselves and wholly depend upon God,”<sup>6</sup>
  
- III. **THE CHURCH IS CATHOLIC.** This term causes people pause -- *Catholic*, because of its link with Roman Catholicism. The term means universal. Herman Witsius (1636-1708) notes, “The epithet *Catholic* does not occur in sacred writ. The first whom we find using it is Ignatius in his *Epistle to the Church of Smyrna*, if indeed that expression was in reality written by Ignatius, and not interpolated by some unfair hand: *Wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.*” But it occurs also in the Epistle of the Church of Smyrna, in which they give an account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, their Pastor; for that Epistle is inscribed to the Church of God at Philomelium, *and to all everywhere that belong to the holy Catholic Church.*”<sup>7</sup>
  
- IV. **THE CHURCH IS APOSTOLIC.** The final attribute of the Church is Apostolicity. Heyns writes, “In addition to describing it as one, holy, and catholic, the Nicene Creed calls the church *apostolic*. (It is the only symbol to do so.) The intention is obviously to forge a historical link between the Church and the apostles, and specifically to make their particular, unrepeatable work the foundation for the Church's message and task. On the other hand, we beg leave to doubt whether this involves a fourth attribute, as has been accepted ever since the Nicene Creed was formulated. Apostolicity is simply not on the same level as the Church's unity, holiness, or catholicity, neither is it of the same nature. Those three attributes pertain so universally and permanently to saving history that they do more than characterize the Church as long as it exists; they are also of the essence of the Kingdom and will remain so after the institutionalized Church has long since disappeared from the scene. Apostolicity is not an eschatological attribute in this sense, but rather the historical method by which the Church realizes those three attributes. Understood in this way, apostolicity is orientated towards the *eschaton*, not part of it. Moreover, it is clear that *apostolic* can easily be replaced by *biblical* or *scriptural*, so that what is expressed by this term might equally well be included among the *notae ecclesiae*. In that case apostolicity is not an attribute but a mark of the Church; that is to say, it is a condition of being the Church, not a consequence. The Church as the Church is recognizable by its apostolicity. And those aspects of apostolicity that cannot be included among the *notae ecclesiae* can be dealt with under catholicity (specifically the consideration of the fullness of truth) as well as in terms of the Church's relationship to the world.”<sup>8</sup>

**CONCLUSION:** These four attributes of Christ's church are all essential. They describe the Church's identity and as such serve to define theological boundaries. When we speak of orthodoxy, i.e., sound doctrine we are affirming these four attributes. Groups like Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are *not* orthodox. They may identify with certain doctrines that appear to be "Christian," but when viewed within the context of pattern of sound doctrine (2 Timothy 1:13; 2:2; Titus 2:1), these groups are *not* orthodox but heterodox. They are not part of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. I close with this observation from Philip Jenkins, "We live in an age when the term *theological* has implications of irrelevant hairsplitting: *It's just a theological quibble*. Still more poisonous is a word like *dogma*. Such objections to theological enterprise are not new. Do churches today fall into internecine conflict over issues of biblical authority and sexual regulations while millions of Christians starve? In the 1930's, some Anglican thinkers urged that the churches should put aside matters of technical theology, as of interest only to cloistered academics. And their proposal received a devastating answer from Dorothy Sayers, one of the great lay theologians of the age. In her 1940 essay *Creed or Chaos*, Sayers tried to explain just why such theological debates and questioning should not be set aside, but rather should remain central to what the church did. For one thing, she argued, the fact that we today regard all these great issues of Christology as trivial or technical means that all these questions have been settled through the strivings of earlier generations. We live on the accumulated cultural and intellectual capital of those earlier thinkers – of Athanasius, Cyril, Leo and the rest – without whom the church would have fallen into moral and spiritual chaos far worse than anything recorded in historical times. The orthodoxy they established is the firm foundation of all modern churches, which we ignore at our peril."<sup>9</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>G. B. Reinecke, "Discovering the Vision: Eight 'Must Answer' Questions for Your Church," *The Bridge Builder* (June, 1997), p. 4. Reinecke is a disciple of church growth guru, C. Peter Wagner, who freely admits that his model of church growth has "always stressed pragmatism," adding elsewhere that "the end *does* justify the means." (cf. his *Leading Your Church to Growth*) (Regal, 1984), p. 201, and *Your Church Can Grow* (Regal, 1976), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>This term, according to C. F. Kell and F. Delitzsch, refers to "the prophetic revelation in itself, and as the contents of that which is proclaimed. . . . a people is in a dissolute condition when the voice of the preacher, speaking from divine revelation, and enlightening their actions and suffering by God's word, is silent amongst them (Psalm 74:9, cf. Amos 8:12); on the other hand, that same people are to be praised as happy when they show due reverence and fidelity to the word of God, both as written and as preached. That the word of God is preached among a people belongs to their condition of life; and they are only truly happy when they earnestly and willingly subordinate themselves to the word of God which they possess and have the opportunity of hearing." *Commentary On the Old Testament VI* (rpt. Hendrickson, 1993), p. 432.

<sup>3</sup>George Barna is the best-known advocate of this approach to church growth. "It is time, says Barna, for the church to adopt a whole new paradigm for understanding itself, a model borrowed from the contemporary business world. Like it or not, the church is not only in a market but is itself a business. It has a *product* to sell – relationships to Jesus and others; its *core product* is the message of salvation, and each local church is a *franchise*. The church's pastors, says Barna, will be judged not by their teaching and counseling but by their ability to run the church *smoothly and efficiently* as if it were a business. And, like any secular business, the church must show a *profit*, which is to say it must achieve success in penetrating and servicing its market. If the proven truths of marketing are followed, Barna tells us, each church *can be the Chrysler of tomorrow*: they can recover from the decrepit condition in which many of them now find themselves and once again begin to flourish." Cited by D. F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland; The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Eerdmans, 1994), p. 73.

<sup>4</sup>Doug Webster, *Household of Faith* (unpublished manuscript, 1995), p. 61. I am indebted to Doug for the general outline of this message.

<sup>5</sup>J. A. Heyns, *The Church* (NGKB, 1980), p. 114. He adds, "All Churches have the same Father, who is the Creator; the same Son, who is the Re-creator; and the same Holy Spirit, who is the Sanctifier." (p. 115)

<sup>6</sup>*The Works of William Perkins V* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), p. 385.

<sup>7</sup>Herman Witsius, *The Apostle's Creed II* (rpt. The den Dulk Christian Foundation, 1993), p. 359.

<sup>8</sup>Heyns, p. 144.

<sup>9</sup>Philip Jenkins, *Jesus Wars: How Four Patriarchs, Three Queens, and Two Emperors Decided What Christians Would Believe for the Next 1,500 Years* (Harper One, 2010), p. 276.