

EXCERPTS FROM

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THE LINK

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF

North Road Chapel (Evangelical)

BIDEFORD

Internet Edition

THE APOSTOLICITY OF THE CHURCH.

Is the church to-day apostolic? There are large sections of Christendom who with great vehemence will answer in the affirmative, whilst others will be negative. Wherein lies the truth? What is the ground upon which these differing theories are based? Is it a matter of importance in any case? It is because the answer to the latter question is yes, that this article appears.

There is a sense in which the church is apostolic, there is also a sense in which she is not, and in view of the claims which are made by so many, it is vital that true believers know the Biblical teaching.

We look first at the foundation of the church in its New Testament concept. Upon what is she built? Many will immediately say, Christ, quoting 1 Corinthians 3:11: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ". This, of course, is verily true, but there is more detail than this given to us in Scripture, all of which must be kept together. Matthew's gospel Chapter 16:13-20, Ephesians 2:20, are key passages concerning this matter.

Rome has taken verse 18 of Matthew chapter 16 and made it to be the chief cornerstone of the papacy: "Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church". This is a fallacy. The church is not built upon Peter, neither was he the first Pope.

If we examine closely these verses in Matthew Chapter 16 we shall discover that the question asked by Christ - "Whom do men say that I the Son of man am? - was not put to Peter alone: Verse 13 states, "He asked his disciples". This question was put to the twelve. and from the twelve He demanded an answer. "He said unto them, but whom say ye that I am?" (verse 15). This verse is plural, THEM and YE. The reply given by Peter in verse 16 "Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God", cannot be understood in any other way than that Peter was speaking on behalf of ALL,

His was the unanimous voice and confession of all the apostles. Hence, verse 20 states, "Then charged He his disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ". He charged his disciples, all of them, not Peter only, that at that point no disclosure was to be made. Nevertheless, here were the men to whom was revealed the deity of Christ, and the mysteries of the Godhead and Incarnation, and to THEM was to be entrusted the full revelation of the things pertaining to the kingdom. They, and the truth revealed to them, were to be the foundation upon which the New Testament church would be built. This is amplified, in Paul's writings concerning the church in his Ephesian epistle - "and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone;" (Eph.2:20). No pre-eminence ascribed to Peter. It is the APOSTLES, the prophets of the New Testament, the channels of the Divine revelation of New Testament truth. Further confirmation of their key position is given by John, "and the wall of the city had TWELVE FOUNDATIONS, and in them the names of the TWELVE APOSTLES of the lamb" (Rev.21.14).

The passage in Matthew chapter 16 is much more than Peter stating a doctrine; it was a unanimous confession that through Divine enlightenment they, the apostles, knew that Jesus of Nazareth with whom they were associating was no mere man, He was none other than the SON OF THE LIVING GOD. Therefore, to them - the twelve - Christ was going to explain, in due course, ALL the things pertaining to the kingdom, all of which would centre around His Divine person and work. (Cf. Acts 1:1-3).

After Pentecost it would eventually all be written down by them under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. (Cf. John 14:26 and John 16:13-15): Thus would come into being the New Testament scriptures - the Apostles Doctrine - and this would be the foundation, the basis, of the New Testament Church. In this sense the Church can be said to be APOSTOLIC.

Having got thus far we must now be careful, for there are certain groups and bodies who conclude that the church of succeeding times must be patterned in every detail to the church in the book of the Acts; but this is not so. For

example:- In the Acts we see two Sabbaths being observed, the old Jewish and the first day of the week. Such scriptures as Acts 2:26, Acts 3:1, Acts 9:20, Acts 13:14, Acts 17:1, clearly show that temple and synagogue worship was running alongside the New Testament church order, but, this was not to be the settled state of affairs.

God destroyed, completely, the Jewish set up in A.D.70. This had no place in the New Testament order and is FOREVER DONE AWAY, as the epistle to the Hebrews clearly teaches; but in the very early years there was an overlap; it was the period of the New Testament foundation stones, when the truth was being set down by those men whom God had ordained to this task - THE APOSTLES. "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will" (Heb.2:3).

The fifth book of the New Testament is precisely as stated - THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES. These men had a peculiar role; a specific ministry - it was foundational. They had special and extraordinary gifts. True it was that there were a few other men who had ability to work certain signs and wonders: Philip of Samaria was one, but this was the direct result of the laying on of the hands of an Apostle, and such as received the gift in this way had no ability to communicate such a gift further. Sign gifts were apostolic inasmuch as they were peculiar to the apostles. Other gifts were given to the church which were successive and continuing, but there were no successors to the apostles.

No hint is given in the Word of God that further apostles would be appointed, or that this office was to be a continuing one. So, when the apostles died their ACTS died also. No more signs, no more wonders.

At this point many will retort by saying that this is not so, and that in their circles they still work miracles etc. So be it; tongues speaking, miracle working can be found in all parts of the world, in both its religions and its paganism. Was it not found in Egypt? (Cf. Exodus 7:11 & 22 and Exodus 8:7 & 18. The church at Corinth had their

sensational flutters of wonders, unknown tongues etc. They despised the true apostle of the Gentiles and called into question his office, (Cf. 1 Cor.9:11-2, 2 Cor.10:1-18) and were carried away by the spurious. These men by whom you are so greatly influenced are not of the apostolic office, states Paul} they may do wonders, but, "such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ." (2 Cor.11:13). Later on, the apostle John writes of those, "who say they are apostles" - THEY ARE NOT, he states (Rev.2:2). "Try the spirits whether they be of God: because many false prophets (apostles) are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). They were abroad even at the close of the period of Christ's true apostles and they have not ceased to exist, indeed, they are greatly multiplied.

In solemn words did the Lord himself speak of this spurious activity and craze for miracle working on the part of men, who would even claim to do these things in His name (Cf. Matt.7:21-23).

The church of our day cannot claim apostolicity in the sense in which we see it in the Book of the Acts. That was a foundational period. The apostles are in focus. They gave the truth, which was authenticated by signs and wonders and divers miracles of the Holy Ghost. We now have the completed canon of Holy Scripture - the written Word revealing the living Word and the two are inseparable. Upon such the Church is built.

We now consider others who claim apostolicity on the grounds of apostolic succession} uninterrupted continuation of the organized church and its ministers from the days of the apostles» that is, the laying on of hands in succession from one bishop to another right down through the generations in an unbroken chain.

It is also part of this teaching that if at any point in the long succession since the apostles any irregularity should have taken place in such ordination of any bishop, then, all the sacraments consecrated and all ordinances performed axe ineffectual. Upon the very surface, apart from the error, one can see how precarious would he the

hope of salvation upon such grounds, for any virtue derived is dependant wholly upon a perfect and unbroken line of faithful men from Pentecost until now. History alone, will prove that this has not been the case, neither would sound reasoning allow it. This theory is nothing more than an unscriptural figment of priestcraft. Most emphatically must it be stated that, nowhere in Scripture can apostolicity be claimed upon this ground.

Is there, then, such a thing as apostolicity in the church today? If so, how is it defined? A church is apostolic in so far as there is DOCTRINAL SUCCESSION. The Reformed fathers stated, "Succession of Doctrine is the mark of the true church, not succession of persons or places".

There are those today, as there always have been, who can humbly, yet, rightly claim APOSTOLICITY; companies of believers that strive to adhere to the "APOSTLES' DOCTRINE". not part of it, but all of it. It is these, and these alone, who have the honoured distinction of being termed apostolic in the real and Biblical sense.

W.H.Holland

APOSTLES. "These had the first and chief place in the church, and the signs of the apostles were found with them; they had their call and mission from Christ, and were not of men nor by men but by Jesus Christ; and as they had their mission and commission immediately from Christ so their doctrine; they neither received it from men, nor were taught it, but they had it by the revelation of Christ. They were infallibly guided into all truth by the inspiration of the Spirit, and had the power of working miracles in confirmation of all this. They went out by authority everywhere preaching the gospel to the conversion of multitudes and were the first planters of churches which others watered, they were not limited to any particular church but had the care of and presided in all the churches whenever they came. This office is now ceased; the apostles have no successors in it; not such who are called lord bishops; for as the apostles had not their pompous titles, nor their grandeur, nor their

wealth, so neither have these lordly bishops their gifts, power and authority; they have neither mission nor commission, nor work similar to theirs."

John Gill

CHRISTIANITY - NOMINAL AND TRUE

When the disciples were "first called Christians at Antioch," I very much doubt if any of them could have foreseen how that noble title was going to prove a weapon in the hands of the devil, to bring disrepute on the name of the Lord, and confusion in the cause of the gospel.

Where the devil cannot destroy what is true, he normally sets out to counterfeit it. After the martyr fires of the early centuries of the Church had failed to destroy the Christian testimony of those days, the devil then used his other weapon. In the introduction of the idea of "National" Christianity - especially under Emperor Constantine, and such like - the devil struck with great cunning and craftiness - bringing into being something that bore the name of Christian, but which, in fact was devoid of the substance or the reality of that name.

Sad to say, even the mighty men of the Protestant Reformation failed to right this situation when it came to their day. They were majoring, of course, in retrieving the lost truth of Justification by faith alone; and future generations must feel for ever indebted to them for their labours. But as far as the true nature of the Christian Church was concerned, and, therefore, the true nature of the term Christian, they simply renovated rather than reformed those old concepts that had come down to them from the Church of Rome. Indeed, what was really required in that area of thinking was a revolution of thought, and this did not take place among the leading figures of the Reformation.

Alongside the idea of a Roman Catholic "Christian" country and State, the Reformers set up the idea of a Protestant "Christian" country and State; and by so doing, they simply compounded the confused use of the term Christian even further. There were those who refused to accept this concept of Christ's Church, of course - just as there had been in the days of Constantine and following - but for

them there was much persecution and often martyrdom. This was the case in Protestant, as well as in Roman Catholic dominated States and countries, depending where the 'dissenters' found themselves. To even suggest that being born into such a "Christian" State did not constitute one a "Christian", was tantamount to denying the whole fabric of Christianity. This was the case, of course, within the whole framework of that line of thinking; but it wasn't the fabric of New Testament Christianity that was being denied by those dissenters, but only the fabric of the devil's counterfeit that made people "Christians" through birth and not rebirth.

To accommodate this idea of "Christian" State and country, the rite of infant baptism was necessarily retained in the thinking of the Reformers. Just as the new-born Israelite child in the Old Testament (if a male) received the rite of circumcision, so the child now born into the "Christian" nation was to receive the rite of "baptism." This was the thinking that lay behind the creation of the child baptism ordinance at the first, and feu: from being abandoned by the Reformers, it was necessary that they should continue it, in a modified form, when States and countries changed from being Roman Catholic "Christian" States and countries to Protestant "Christian" States and countries.

The act of infant baptism was a rite of initiation; indeed, it was an act of confirming that the child was not "pagan," but "Christian" in this new-found use of the word. The child had been born into a "Christian" State, therefore, it had the right of reception into the Christian Church of that State. The name and title of Christian was to be no longer the prerogative of the "disciples" of Christ; those who had been born, "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God," and who were endeavouring to walk in the light of His Word. From those Constantinian days onward the term Christian was to be robbed of its real meaning and plundered of its true nature.

Now, none of the foregoing should be looked on as simply historical. We today are still reaping the fruits of that confusion in the cause of the gospel and disrepute on the name of Christ that the counterfeiting of the term Christian started. Whenever believers take in hand to

confront men and women with the gospel in such "Christian" lands, the great barrier that they are immediately faced with is the claim by a big majority of those men and women that they are "Christians" already. Haven't they been born in a Christian country? Haven't they been baptized into the Christian Church? Hasn't it been done at the hands of a Christian minister, before a Christian congregation? What other conclusion might such men and women come to, but that they are, indeed, "Christians" already!

With regards to the disrepute that this deceptive use of the noble name has brought to the Name of the Saviour, who can but hang down their hands with sorrow in the light of some of the events of history that have been attributed to "Christians," and which are with us even to this day?

As we write this, the terrible slaughter of something like fifteen-hundred Palestinian men, women, and children has just taken place in a refugee camp in Beirut. The deed, in itself, is horrifying enough in its scope and savagery, but when we hear it attributed to "the Christians," or the "Christian militia," who can but see the devil's smile spread out behind it all?

"Oh, yes," we may say, as evangelical, professing Christians, "We all know what that is; that is nominal Christianity - Christianity in name only." So the explanation usually runs; and runs true. But we must ever be careful not to be lulled into thinking that when we have stated the explanation of a thing, that there is no application of that explanation for us in our lives. And as far as this whole business of "nominal Christianity" is concerned, it is high time for those who are really Christians to cease giving credence to it through their part in it, and to show it for what it is by standing apart from it. To be part of a Church, denomination, or structure, whose very being and essence consists in the acceptance of those who are merely "Christian" in name only, is to really deny the Christian name, and to give support to its mis-usage and abuse in our day. To be "in membership" along with those who are simply nominal "Christians," or to sit at the Lord's table in fellowship with such, is simply to validate the counterfeit usage of the Christian name.

(continued on page 13)

GLIMPSES INTO THE WEST COUNTRY
VISITS OF GEORGE WHITFIELD AS
RECORDED IN HIS JOURNALS.

George Whitfield, born December 1714: His parents kept the Bell Inn, Gloucester: Converted at the age of 20: Travelled extensively throughout the British Isles and America: Died at the age of 55 years.

The following are extracts from his Journals.

"On Saturday last (October 22nd 1743) when I came to Wellington the Rev. Mr. Darracott persuaded me to stay there, because the country people had come from all quarters, several times, to hear me, and had been disappointed. I consented, and preached in his meetinghouse in the evening to a large auditory. The Rev. Mr. Fawcett, formerly pupil to Dr. Doddridge came there and stayed all night. The blessed Lord Jesus gave us much freedom in conversation.

Sunday morning I again preached in the meeting-house; and in the evening to seven thousand in the field. On Monday at ten in the morning and at two in the afternoon, I preached at Cullompton with much freedom and power. I was kindly received by some reputable Dissenters and am now setting out for Exeter.

Exeter - October 28 1743.

I have a strong conviction that our Lord intends doing something in the West. Since my arrival here, letters of invitation have come from many parts. I preached this afternoon on Southernhay Green. Even some of the polite were much affected. I believe I shall think it my duty to stay in these parts some time.

Exeter - November 6th 1743.

On Monday last (October 31st) I went to Axminster and preached to about two thousand ... The next day I preached to an even greater number of people, and at night gave an exhortation. Our Lord graciously vouchsafed His blessing.

On Wednesday I went to Ottery, but, just as I named my text the bells rang. Upon this I adjourned to a field., whither the people ran in droves ... A clergyman came and asked me by what authority I preached, and said that it was a riot and that the meeting was illegal ... I showed him my authority by preaching on the words "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature". In the evening I returned to Exeter, where some hundreds were waiting to hear me expound. Postscript - Ten at night. It would have pleased you to have been here this evening. I question whether near a third part of Exeter were not attending on the word preached. All was solemn and awful, and the Lord gave me much assistance from His Holy Spirit. (From Exeter Whitfield proceeds to Bideford.)

Bideford - November 11th 1743.

The Rev. Mr. Thompson, Rector of St. Gennys, Cornwall is here. God willing I will go with him to-morrow. There is also another clergyman about eighty years of age, but not more than one year old in the school of Christ; he lately preached three times and rode forty miles the same day. The Dissenting minister and his wife here are very hearty and perhaps here is one of the most settled Christian Societies in the kingdom. I cannot well describe with what power the Word was attended ... The old clergyman was much broken ... I suppose there were upwards of two thousand people in the evening. (On Saturday November 12th Whitfield accompanied Mr. Thompson to his rectory at St. Gennys where he remained a fortnight.)

St. Gennys November 25th 1743.

I am glad that the Lord inclined my heart to come hither. He has been with us of a truth. How did His stately steps appear in the sanctuary last Lord's day! Many prayers went up from the worthy rector and others, for an outpouring of God's blessed Spirit. They were answered. Arrows of conviction flew so thick and fast, and such a universal weeping prevailed from one end of the congregation to the other, that good Mr. Thompson could not help going from seat to seat to comfort and encourage wounded souls ... I could enlarge but I must be away to Bideford, just to give Satan another stroke there, and bid my friends farewell, and then return the way I came, namely, through Exeter, Wellington, Bristol and then to the great metropolis.

Towards the end of January 1749 Whitfield set out again for the West of England proceeding to Gloucester and then to Bristol. He writes: "The power of the Lord attended, as in former days and many were brought under great awakening".

On Feb. 8th he moved on to Exeter "There was great confusion ... yet great crowds assembled". Then to Bovey Tracey where he "found several poor souls and at Marychurch about a score of converted people who had been greatly persecuted. At Kingsbridge at eight o'clock at night he found a thousand people assembled in the street, and at once commenced to preach on the words "I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day, the night cometh when no man can work." He writes:- "I preached in the street. The moon shone, all were quiet, and I hope some began to think of working out their salvation with fear and trembling."

On February 15th 1749 Whitfield arrived at Plymouth being escorted the last ten miles of his journey by a cavalcade of his "spiritual children" who had gone out to meet him. Upon arriving, although the hour was late, he immediately commenced preaching. Here he remained a week, during which he wrote the following to Lady Huntingdon:- "about two thousand attend every night. Last Sunday evening in the field there were over five thousand hearers ... Everywhere fresh doors are opening, and the people flock from all quarters".

On February 2nd 1750 Whitfield again travels West, to Gloucester, Bristol, Taunton and Wellington. Here once more he stays with Mr. Darcacott. He writes of him as follows:- "Mr. Darracott is a flaming preacher of the gospel and who may justly be styled as the 'Star in the West'. He has suffered much reproach, and in the space of three months has lost three lovely children. Two of them died the Saturday evening before the sacrament was to be administered, but weeping did not hinder sowing. He preached next day, and ministered as usual; and for his three natural children the Lord gave him above thirty spiritual children". Whilst in Wellington Whitfield states that when he preached "a multitude assembled". From there he moved again to Exeter and then to Plymouth where he

preached twelve times in six days. From Plymouth Whitfield set out again for Cornwall accompanied by two clergymen, Rev. S. Thompson of St. Gennys and the Rev. Mr. Grigg who had come to Plymouth purposely to be his escort.

On Saturday 4th March 1750 he preached in the parish church at St. Gennys. "It was unusual" he says, for four clergymen were there in gowns and cassocks and also four of Mr. Wesley's preachers!

Six days later he wrote the following to the Countess of Huntingdon:- Redruth March 10 1750. "Every day since I left St. Gennys I have been travelling and preaching. At Port Isaac the Redeemer's stately steps were seen indeed. At Camelford, I preached with great quietness in the streets! At St. Andrews we had a very powerful season. Yesterday at Redruth several thousands attended. Invitations are sent to me from Falmouth, and several other places. I want more tongues, more bodies, more souls for the Lord Jesus. Had I ten thousand, He should have them all. After preaching about noon I am to go to St. Ives; and in about nine days I hope to be in Exeter. Mr. Thompson is mighty hearty, and is gone back to his parish in a gospel flame." From Exeter he writes to her Ladyship again.

Exeter March 21 1750. "Immediately after writing my last,

I preached to many thousands at Gwennap. On Monday, I preached again at Redruth at ten in the morning to near ten thousand souls. Arrows of conviction seemed to fly fast. In the evening I preached to above five hundred at a place twelve miles distant, and then rode about sixteen miles to one - Mr. B. - a wealthy man.

In riding, my horse threw me violently on the ground, but I got up without receiving much hurt. The next day (Tuesday March 13th) we had a most delightful season at St. Mewan: and the day following a like time at Port Isaac. In the evening, I met dear Mr. Thomson at Mr. Bennet's, a friendly minister aged fourscore years, and on Thursday preached in both his churches. Blessed seasons both!

On Friday we went to Bideford where there is perhaps one of the best little flocks in all England. Here the power of God so came down while I was expounding to them that dear Mr. Thompson could scarce stand under it.

On the Monday Whitfield returned to Exeter and from thence to London again.

We have heard with our ears, O God,
our fathers have told us, what work
thou didst in their days, in the
times of old. (Psalm 44:1)

Wilt thou not revive us again: that
thy people may rejoice in thee?
(Psalm 85:6)

CHRISTIANITY - NOMINAL AND TRUE (Continued from Page 8)

There is but one type of person recognised as a Christian in the Word of God, and they are such who have been born of the Spirit of God, have confessed their sins meaningfully before God, and exercised faith in Jesus Christ His Son. They are the descendants of those who were "first called Christians at Antioch." If the devil has duped some into believing that they are Christians when they are not, God forbid that those who really are Christians should encourage that counterfeit in any way.

W.J.Seaton
Minister of Inverness Reformed Baptist Church.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

THURSDAY 6th January 1983 - A Prayer Meeting will be held in the main Chapel at 7 pm: in accordance with our usual practice at the commencement of a New Year.

THURSDAY 3rd February 1983 - The annual visit and report of THE LONDON CITY MISSION. Meeting commences at 7:30 pm

EDITORIAL

Looking back over the past year we give thanks to God for the way he has led and sustained us and for the sense of unity in the church, and of purpose.

There is a great need among elderly folk in nursing homes and hospitals and the regular weekly and daily visits which are made, have, we believe proved a blessing to many. A little conversation, reading from the Word of God and sometimes playing one or two favourite hymns, is a great comfort to those nearing the end of life's journey.

During the summer months we have been able, with the support of the local Authorities, to hold services on the river bank car park on Sunday evenings. There has been some excellent preaching and we are glad to have this opportunity for public witness in a place where local people and holiday makers come to enjoy very pleasant surroundings.

The Link, published every quarter, has been well received by many apart from our own fellowship and our circulation has increased over the past year.

In the ministry of the Word of God, the subjects at present occupying our attention, namely, The Life of David, Genesis and the Church, are to be continued, God willing, into the New Year. The Psalmist prays, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law": We can truly say that many "wondrous things" have been revealed to us.

We approach the New Year with all its uncertainties confident in the knowledge that "all things work together for good to those that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose". (Romans 8:28).

Editor (L.W.Gee.)