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**North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD**

FORTY MOMENTOUS DAYS

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen: To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” (Acts 1:1-3)

The earthly life and work of the Lord Jesus Christ is defined and demarcated by five great events, namely: incarnation, ministration, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. If there is one period amongst these which receives less attention, or is preached upon more infrequently, it is perhaps that time between the Lord’s rising from the dead, and His return to heaven from earth. Nevertheless, this short interlude has profound spiritual significance, and may rightly be described as ‘forty momentous days’.

The duration itself is noteworthy, as throughout Scripture, periods of forty days are often associated with ‘**preparation**’. The record of Christ’s three-year public ministry both commences and concludes with a special period of this length. In the first instance, by a time of privation and temptation in the wilderness, He began the work upon earth. On this second occasion, He was preparing for ascension to Heaven, the glorious return to His Father’s presence, and the divine work of intercession.

This was also a period of preparation for His disciples. They would shortly experience the dawn of a new era in the purposes of God. The Holy Spirit would descend upon them; the church would be established; the “*middle wall of partition*” between Jew and Gentile would be forever broken down, and the message of salvation preached unto all. National, old covenant Israel, “*which decayeth and waxeth old*” was “*ready to vanish away*” (cf Hebrews 8:13); yet even at this stage, the disciples were still looking for the revival of

an earthly, Jewish kingdom (cf Luke 24:21, Acts 1:6). It was essential that they be taught the “*things pertaining to the kingdom of God*” namely, that it is heavenly in origin, and **spiritual** in nature. They needed also to be briefed for their mission upon earth, and charged with a great commission, binding upon every follower of Christ in all succeeding generations.

This instruction and initiation would be achieved in the space of forty days – not by a lengthy Upper Room-style discourse, or regular daily teaching, but by a series of ‘appearances’. These were not merely isolated incidents; fragmentary and unrelated. Rather do they constitute a glorious whole; a gradual unfolding and development of revelation. By holding these events together a great richness and breadth of truth comes to light, both doctrinal and practical. Indeed, there are few teachings in the New Testament which do not come legitimately within the scope of these forty days. The Gospel writers, and the Apostle Paul, recount a total of eleven occasions on which the Lord “*shewed Himself alive after His passion*”. He appeared...

- ...to Mary Magdalene (John 20:14)
- ...to certain women (Matthew 28:9-10)
- ...to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34)
- ...to two disciples at Emmaus (Luke 24)
- ...to ten disciples in the Upper Room (John 20:19)
- ...to eleven disciples in the Upper Room (John 20:26)
- ...to certain disciples fishing (John 21)
- ...to above five hundred brethren (1 Corinthians 15:6)
- ...to James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- ...at the Apostolic Commission (Matt. 28:16; Mark 16:14)
- ...at His Ascension (Luke 24:50, Acts 1:8-10)

A forthcoming series of articles will consider in detail this post-resurrection ministry of Christ. May God be pleased to bless it to the spiritual benefit of all who read.

W. H. Molland

Now ye are the Body of Christ **1 Corinthians 12:27**

“Within the pages of Holy Scripture there are to be found many different analogies and illustrations of ‘The Church’. These are given to explain its true nature, and to increase every member’s understanding and appreciation of the glorious institution to which they belong. Some of these descriptions apply primarily to the **entire** Church of God – the Church universal, from every time and place. For example, the analogy of the in-gathered **flock of sheep** is a picture of the whole Church brought out of every nation and generation: “*other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring*” (John 10:16). They will be seen in their totality in that Last Day, when Christ will set all the “*sheep on His right hand, and say unto them, Come ye blessed of my Father; inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*” (Matthew 25:34). Similarly, the metaphor of the Church as the **Bride of Christ** will only be fully realised when the completed Church is finally assembled, perfected and glorified, and presented as a chaste virgin, a bride adorned by God, to Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom (cf Revelation 21:2).

However, the description of the Church as a **body** is valid here and now, and is true of the **visible, local** Church. Paul, speaking to the assembled believers at Corinth said: “*Now ye are the Body of Christ*”. Then and there, those Christians, in that place could rightly be called ‘The Body of Christ’: it was their title and privilege. It was **not** the case that the Corinthian congregation constituted the ‘mouth’ or the ‘foot’, whilst the Church at Ephesus supplied the ‘eye’, and the Colossians were the ‘ear’, pending a future unification. No, the analogy of the Church as the Body of Christ applies separately and peculiarly to each local company of God’s

people; it is a picture of the independent, autonomous, self-governing Church.

‘Now’, (at this present time) ‘ye’, (Biblically ordered, individual Churches), ‘*are the Body of Christ*’. There is no doubt about it, nor any question of opting in or out of this Divinely appointed status. This is what grace has made them, and Scripture declares them to be. The local Church is to be an epitome, and example, and living demonstration of the Body of the Lord Jesus Christ. The responsibility and privilege which this entails is immense. Christ, the **Head**, has ascended back into Heaven, and is no longer seen or heard by the physical sight and sense of man; but His **Body** (to which He is inseparably and eternally united) is still upon earth – where men may continue to observe and experience it. That Body is the local Church.

Speaking naturally, a strong and healthy body is one which is controlled wholly and solely by the head, and is responsive to its every command. Anything less would constitute a disability or abnormality. The same applies in a spiritual sense: for a Church to truly be called the Body of Christ, it must be fully obedient to His Word, and endeavour to uphold every aspect of doctrine; teaching the observance of **all** things that the Great Head has commanded (cf Matthew 28:20).

Alas that such Churches are a rarity in these days! By contrast, there are innumerable places where the highest authority is a creed, or handbook of doctrine, formulated by men, but at variance with Holy Writ. Many other congregations make a verbal assent to the primacy of Scripture, yet their behaviour proves the contrary – as ministers and members alike are their own law-givers, doing that which is right in their own eyes (cf Judges 17:6).”

R. J. Steward
(*sermon excerpt*)

A Letter to an Episcopal Clergyman *by Philip Mauro*

Preface

With the conclusion of the series of articles upon John's Gospel chapter seventeen, an opportunity has arisen on this occasion to reproduce in full a lengthy letter dating from the turn of the last century. It was published in the magazine '*Pilgrim Pathway*', and is included here by kind permission of its editor, Mr C. H. Shofstahl.

Philip Mauro, from whose pen this correspondence originated, is a remarkable, but largely forgotten character from recent history. He primarily achieved renown, long before coming to salvation, as one of America's foremost patent lawyers. Being admitted to the bar of the Supreme Court in 1892, he quickly established an unassailable reputation, successfully prosecuting many complex and high-profile cases. Yet, despite reaching the pinnacle of his profession, and achieving so much in the pursuit of his career, Mauro did not find happiness or contentment. He devoted increasing amounts of time "in the attempt to find distraction in the gaities, amusements, and excitements of a godless, pleasure-seeking world, among whom [he] was as godless as any" – but all to no avail.

At the age of sixteen, Mauro had become a member and communicant of the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany, which he attended regularly; although the great number of sermons he heard over the years failed to make any impression. At length even this outward show of religion began to wane, and he ceased to attend. Thus it was that a spring evening in 1903 found Mauro in the queue to a New York theatre – from whence he heard the faint sound of

hymn-singing from a nearby place of worship, and was inexplicably drawn to investigate. It was the Gospel Tabernacle: an independent, evangelistic outreach church established and lead by A. B. Simpson (later founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance). Here it was that Mauro heard and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ, and came to repentance and faith. There was nothing in that humble gathering to appeal to his natural appetites, nothing to persuade his trained legal mind: a work of grace had been performed. He was forty-four years of age, and from this dramatic conversion, he went on to become as prominent a Christian as he was a lawyer.

Mauro maintained his integrity in his secular vocation and his faith. He lost no opportunity in witnessing to his clients and business associates, amongst whom was the inventor, Thomas Edison. He also prepared the legal briefs for the prosecution in the famous Tennessee-Scopes Trial of 1925, in which the law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in state schools was successfully upheld. He also wrote extensively on a variety of theological and doctrinal subjects.

In the following letter, Mauro is replying to an acquaintance within the Episcopal Church who clearly had some criticism of his move away from that denomination to a position of independency and non-conformity. Mauro both defends and explains his actions, and shows how far the ‘established’ Church is removed from the Biblical standard. The identity of the addressee, and his response to this letter, are unknown – but may all who read it on this occasion, be instructed and edified thereby.

Editorial Notes: The term ‘Episcopal’ describes those churches in the USA which are in communion with the Church of England. It may also denote any ecclesiastical organisation that is governed centrally by a system of bishops. Grammatical and typographical alterations are denoted in square brackets, thus [...]

Dear Brother in The Lord:

Yours of the 27th *ult.* relieves my mind as regards your attitude towards the Church of Rome. There remains for consideration between us the important question of the proper church relations of the redeemed people of God. Is it the revealed will of God that pardoned sinners, converted through the gospel and baptised into Christ, should join one of the religious denominations of our day? And if so, which one?

Since you have put some plain and direct questions to me, I am constrained to give a clear answer, especially as you tell me you wish to know my views “not for argument” but for any help they may possibly give you in your perplexities. Such discussion will require both grace and forbearance on both sides, since, at the present moment, we are very far apart in our views as to the Church of God. The difference is very plain to me, because I spent forty years in association with the Episcopal Church. I have withdrawn from that organisation (and from all religious organisations) because of convictions wrought by examination of the Scriptures. You, on the other hand, have joined it, for reasons that doubtless seemed to you sufficient. As a matter of personal history the fact is that, so long as I remained a worldling, walking according to my own desires, in indifference to the Word of God, living openly in the pleasures and godless diversions of the world, I was quite at home in the ‘church’, where no-one ever asked embarrassing questions as to my spiritual state or manifested interest in my eternal welfare. [So] far as I knew then, or know now, the other ‘members’ – many of them dear personal friends for whom I have sincere affection – were in precisely the same spiritual darkness and indifference as myself. [Thus] I might have continued to the end, so far from there being anything in the proceedings of the ‘church’ to arouse me to a sense of my perilous condition; had not God in His mercy (after years of carelessness, after I had been taken up with

materialism, pantheism, theosophy, etc, none of which things interfered with my being a church member) brought me into contact with an humble company of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and, through them, showed me His way of salvation by grace – apart from works of law – through faith in the crucified and risen Saviour. Thereafter my position in the Episcopal Church was one of increasing difficulty, especially as I got better acquainted with the Scriptures, and noted the great difference between the teaching and ways of the apostles and those of the ‘church’. In the course of a few years from my conversion it became clear to me that I could not follow the light that had been given me and continue to be an ‘Episcopalian’. I need cite only one clear word of command to explain why I could not, with a good conscience, remain in association with the Episcopal Church: “*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers*”.

[Now] to answer your questions, or rather to point out what I understand to be the answers of the Word of God thereto:

In separating from the Episcopal Church, did I separate from the ‘Church of the living God’? Not so. [To] support that statement it suffices to point out that the Church of God is a company of saved **people**, called **out of** the world – a chosen generation, a holy nation, a peculiar people; [whereas] the Episcopal Church is distinctly and conspicuously a **part of** the world. It is not required of its members, nor even of its clergy, that they be born of the Spirit, or that they be separate from the world and its vanities. I am aware there are saints of God in it; but the bulk of its membership – which determines its character, controls its policy, and defrays its expenses – is composed of respectable people of the world. Moreover, it is the church doctrine and ceremonies, more than anything else, that prevents the unfortunate members from discovering their need of God’s salvation, and from discovering also the blessed truth of the gospel of His grace.

You quote Acts 2:42 – and this a good place to begin an inquiry regarding the Church of God. I think we find God’s definition of it here in the words “*And all **that believed** were together*”. This company of those **that believe** is “*the household of **faith***”. Peter describes them as those “*that have obtained **like precious faith** with us*” (the apostles). Those constitute “*the fellowship of the apostles*”. The fact that they were **believers in the Lord Jesus Christ** both united them together, and also separated them from those who believed not. As it was then, so it is and must be now; for God’s ways have not changed. [Even] though it cannot now be said that “*all*” who believe are together, the scattered condition of the members of Christ does not affect the truth that the Church of God is composed of **believers**; and that the Church is manifested visibly wherever there is a company of **saints**, be it only “*two or three*” that are gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not at all a question of numbers. A few who follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart, and who walk in obedience to His commandments, are a ‘visible manifestation’ of the Church of God! Whereas the largest congregation of unconverted people, even though there be a few saints among them, are **not** a Church of God, and hence cannot possibly be a visible manifestation of it. A thing cannot be the manifestation of what it is not.

Acts 2 also tells us clearly the manner in which the Lord **adds** members to His Church; and it need hardly be said that none but He can add to it, and that none can gain admission to it in any other way than His way. Here we read, “*And the same day there were **added** unto them about three thousand souls*”, [and] further on “*And the **Lord added** to the church (or, to them) such as should be saved*” (literally, were being saved). [Again] in chapter 6:14, “*And **believers** were the more **added** to the Lord*”. Such ‘addings’ have been going on to the present day; and even though the existing

confusion in professing christendom hides the truth as to the Church of God from many who are 'added' to it, nevertheless that Church is still composed **only of believers**, and it is still the will of God that believers should be **together**.

Looking further at the record given us in Acts 2 we see also the **means whereby** sinners were converted into saints, and added to the Lord. The great instrument was **the gospel**, without which there would be no Church of God. Peter announced the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, who had been crucified, according to the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God; and when hearers were pricked in their heart, and asked what they should do, he commanded them to repent and be baptised for the remission of their sins, promising them that they should receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. Only by hearing the gospel of the crucified and risen Saviour, and the proclamation of forgiveness of sins in His name, do sinners become **believers**.

Compare this with the manner in which members are added to the Episcopal Church. In the first place, there is the vital difference that the Gospel of Christ, which is God's power unto salvation has **no place or part in** adding members to the Episcopal Church. In all my Sunday-school days I do not remember that the gospel was ever put to me; and I am satisfied that my teachers were as ignorant of it as I was. We have then the striking fact that the indispensable instrument for adding members to the Church of Christ has **no part at all** in adding members to the Episcopal Church. From this fact alone one must conclude that, so far from being one and the same, there is of necessity a vast difference between them.

The means whereby one becomes connected with the Episcopal Church is thus stated in the words of the church catechism: "...baptism, **wherein** I was made a member of Christ, a child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven" (and what is here

called ‘baptism’ is not **baptism** at all, but the sprinkling of a little water on the heads of unconscious infants). I confess I am filled with indignation when I think how this deadly error is drilled into little children; and I deem it a miracle of God’s grace and power when any who have been reared under its influence are brought to the knowledge of the truth. But my purpose here is not to denounce the pernicious error of baptismal regeneration, but merely to point out the vast differences between the Church of God and the Episcopal Church, which differences forced themselves upon my view as I became acquainted with the Scriptures. It is enough therefore to note that, in the doctrines of the Episcopal Church, God’s solemn act of the burial of believers with Christ in baptism (cf Romans 6, Colossians 2) is displaced by infant sprinkling; and that, to this vain ceremony is attributed the power to regenerate unconscious infants, and to make them “*members of Christ*”.

This foundation error affects the entire system. In consequence thereof the distinction between believers and unbelievers – between the living and the dead – is obliterated. The entire congregation are, without distinction, addressed as ‘dearly beloved brethren’; and all join equally in the various ceremonies of the Church.

You say that “in principle at least, we (Episcopalians) have no other ambition than to continue steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers”. I do not know just how far the above statement is qualified by the words “in principle at least”; but my experience has been that I could not continue in the things specified in Acts 2:42, and at the same time continue in the Episcopal Church. I know the average membership of that body quite well, and feel warranted in saying that there is no purpose on their part to continue in the four items mentioned in Acts 2:42.

(a) **The Apostles' doctrine.** It would require many pages to state the particulars wherein the Episcopal Church has departed from the Apostles' doctrine. But to speak only of what is fundamental, I would point out that the gospel of Christ, which is the cornerstone of the Apostles' doctrine, is almost unknown among Episcopalians. Salvation by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works of law, is a strange doctrine to the great majority. It is not merely that the gospel of God's grace is neglected, but that "*another gospel, which is not another*", is put in its place. Upon the foundation of baptismal regeneration is reared a legal system of works, sacraments, and ceremonies, embracing the grievous error of Arminianism, and inculcating the idea that no one is assured of final salvation until death. Hence, instead of gathering those who are "*saved*" (cf 1 Corinthians 1:18, Ephesians 2:8, etc.), and who 'know that they have eternal life' (cf 1 John 5:13), [there is] a membership composed of those who either are not saved (and do not pretend to be), or who do not know whether they are saved or not (and seem to have little concern about it). [Such] a membership is the inevitable product of the system: "*Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*".

Again a cardinal point in the Apostles' doctrine is that believers are **separated from the world by the cross of Christ**, to walk in His path of rejection and reproach, as strangers and pilgrims on earth; that the friendship of the world is enmity with God, and they who court the world's favours and partake of its dainties, are in a spiritual sense "*adulterers*" – guilty of wicked unfaithfulness to Christ. This is not the doctrine of the Episcopal Church. Her members occupy prominent places in the world, and openly take part in the world's politics, social gaieties, pleasures and godless amusements. This is true of 'clergy' and 'laity' alike. And in so doing they incur no discipline, and their Church standing is not affected in the least.

(b) **The Apostles' Fellowship.** The Apostles' fellowship is the company of those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. It is the company of those whom God has "*called unto the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*". [God] Himself "*has set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him*" (1 Corinthians 1:9, 12:18). Again, in the highest aspect, the Apostles' fellowship is "*with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ*". This fellowship is enjoyed by those who walk in the light, as He is in the light, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses them from all sin (cf 1 John 1:7).

The fellowship of the Episcopal Church is quite a different thing, [in] that it is not necessary that one's sins be forgiven, that he be redeemed by the blood of Christ, or that he have eternal life. Manifestly one must be brought **into** the Apostles' fellowship, else he cannot "*continue*" therein.

(c) **The Breaking of the Bread (loaf).** According to 1 Corinthians 10, the cup of blessing which **we** (believers) bless is "*the communion of the blood of Christ*"; and the bread (or, loaf) which we break is "*the communion of the body of Christ*". The "*breaking of bread*" therefore, is the communion of those who share together in the benefits of the blood of Christ, and of His body, offered as a sacrifice on the cross. In this observance they remember the Lord, and show His death till He come.

In the Episcopal Church those who have been 'confirmed' receive what is called a 'sacrament', said to be 'the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace'. This appears to me to be a very different thing from the Lord's Supper.

(d) **"And the prayers".** "*The prayers*" of the apostolic pattern, and in fact the entire order of the meetings of the church, as given in the Scriptures, are absent from the various ceremonies of the Episcopal

Church, all of which are of human origin, dating long after the day of the apostles. **Praying** is entirely supplanted by the saying of prayers, all pre-arranged, and which **must** be said in the rigid order prescribed, regardless of the mind of the Spirit. This inflexible system makes it impossible to follow the pattern of [Scripture...] In a word, **God's** order would be regarded, in an Episcopal Church, as dis-order.

I was reading lately in Exodus God's directions for the construction of the tabernacle and its appointments, and was more forcibly impressed than ever by the strictness and frequent repetition of the command that every detail was to be according to God's own pattern, and that not one thing of man's devising was to be allowed in the arrangements of God's house. We know that those things were but "*shadows*" of God's "*spiritual house*", which is now [being built] "*for an habitation of God through the Spirit*". The doctrine of the Apostles is given us that we may know "*how we ought to behave ourselves in the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth*". Since it is **impossible** to follow the Apostles' teaching in the Episcopal Church, that reason alone would constrain me to leave it. For its arrangements – its keeping of days and times and seasons, its rites and ceremonies, and its orders of clergy and vestments – are not of God, but of man.

[My] withdrawal from the Episcopal Church did not put me "outside all ecclesiastical relation", as you say. On the contrary, it has enabled me to enjoy true church-fellowship with those who, in faithfulness to Christ and His word, have separated from all sects and systems, to meet simply as believers, in His Name alone, as in apostolic times. The 'churches' do not unite the saints, but divide them. Hence the only way whereby 'believers' can be 'together', is by first departing from all religious denominations. [It] must be admitted that conditions in the latter are such that believers in the

Lord Jesus Christ, who may be connected with them, would not be missed. The organisations would get along very well without them.

Your yearning for “sympathetic fellowship with believers” touches me deeply. You say that such fellowship would be rendered impossible by my example. But is that really the case? Does not my example suggest to you the way whereby such fellowship may be enjoyed? I have experienced no lack of it in recent years.

And you ask “must every believing layman leave his believing pastor...or must he leave even his worldly-minded minister, and forego the possible chance of being the means of converting him?” Of course, if the Episcopal Church is not the place for Christ’s people, it is not the place for His pastors. So the question arises what is a ‘pastor’? and what is a ‘layman’? In the Episcopal Church we find a class of ‘clergy’, set above the people, invested with authority, garbed in distinctive vestments, and dignified with rank and titles, the very least of which is ‘Reverend’ – a character which in Scripture is ascribed to God’s name only. Men are admitted into this clerical class by going through a course of theological education and certain ceremonies of human invention. They need not be converted, and, as your letter plainly indicates, unregenerate ‘ministers’ are not a rarity in the Episcopal Church. Yet they may attain to the highest rank and station, and receive homage from those beneath them. And, however it may affect your conscience, the system to which you belong requires you, on certain occasions, to address one who may be, to your knowledge, a rejecter of Christ and a denier of the faith, as ‘right reverend father in God’. Is there not in all this a flagrant disregard of the plain commandments of Christ? (cf Matthew 20:25-28, 23:8-12, etc.)

Briefly stated, the institution of clerisy and the division of the people into two classes, is one of the many things which distinguishes the Episcopal Church from the Church of God. In the

latter there are no ‘clergy’ and ‘laity’. “*One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren*”. But the Episcopal Church without its ‘clergy’ would speedily come to an end. In the Church of God a ‘pastor’ is not the product of a theological education and of humanly devised ceremonies. He is one of the **gifts of the ascended Christ** (cf Ephesians 4:7-17), and is one qualified by the **measure of the grace of Christ** to exercise pastoral care over “*the flock of God*”. Pastors are [...] men whom **the Holy Ghost** (not man) has made “*overseers to feed the church of God which He hath purchased with His own blood*” (Acts 20:28). These, and other ministers, given by Christ and qualified by the Holy Spirit, are for “*the edifying of the body of Christ*”. In that work, every believer has a part, as it is written “*unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ*”; and again “*As every man has received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God*” (Ephesians 4:7, 1 Peter 4:10) [...] In the light of God’s Word I can but see a great difference between a pastor of God’s flock and an Episcopal minister.

As for yourself, I reach out my hand to you as a beloved brother in the Lord, to be loved and prized for His sake. But whether or not you are one of Christ’s **pastors**, sent by Him to feed His lambs, I do not know; and if such you are, it seems to me you are far otherwise employed than He would have you. You refer to the Lord’s parables in Matthew 13, and particularly to that of the drag-net cast into the sea, as representing the Church. But whatever be the interpretation of those parables, the Church of God is too clearly defined in plain language in the Scriptures to admit of the idea that **it** is a net cast into the sea gathering both **good** and **bad**. However much that parable might seem to resemble the Episcopal Church it bears no resemblance to the Church of God. The latter is not that which **gathers** of every kind, but is the company of saved ones, chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and now

gathered out to Him, and separated from unbelievers. The mixture “*of every kind*” describes the condition of the christianised nations, but it does not describe the Church of God. [...] In the parable of wheat and tares, whereof the Lord’s explanation is given, we are instructed that “*the field is the world*”, not the **church**. Wherever in **the world** the good seed is sown, there the devil sows tares[...] But the Church of God is quite another matter.

The letter is long, and has been very difficult to write, since it is an ungracious task to point out the faults and errors in [an] institution to which not a few saints of God are devotedly attached. Yet if there be the differences which I have pointed out between the Episcopal Church and the Church of God, it is most desirable that they should be brought to the attention of the people of God. I am sure I will give you no offence by my plain speaking, and that you will search the Scriptures whether these things be so.

Yours in the love and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Philip Mauro.

Editorial

The words and sentiments of the foregoing letter have lost nothing of their potency. If anything, their relevance is but increased with the passage of time, and the ongoing declension of the Episcopal or ‘Established’ Churches. Still in the present day, these ecclesiastical organisations deceive multitudes. Whilst laying claim to orthodoxy and antiquity, they preach and practice that which is patently in opposition to the Word of God; and by their systems of admission and confirmation, they give to their adherents a false sense of salvation and ill-founded eternal security.

In defence of these institutions, many make appeal to the long history and tradition in which they are steeped. But what are the origins of all these rites and ceremonies, upon which so much of their ‘worship’ relies? They are the notions and inventions of men, and are alien to the Scriptures; they are man-made, and not God-given. The words of Christ in the seventh chapter of Mark’s Gospel were directed toward the established, nationalistic religion of His day. He made clear how carnal innovation becomes accepted and entrenched, to the ruination of true, Biblical worship.

“In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (verse 7). In the initial stages, the devices of men are elevated to a position of equal importance with the doctrine of Scripture. At this point, worship becomes ‘vanity’; for what praise can God receive from a man who does not differentiate between human contrivance, and Divine commandment?

“For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men” (verse 8). The tide of time, beating upon men’s weak resolve produces a gradual erosion of a Church’s order and practice. Yet it is invariably the case that God’s commandments are first to be abandoned and abrogated, whilst earth-borne customs are clung on to, and dutifully maintained. Thus ‘tradition’ waxes, and Truth wanes.

“Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition” (verse 9). It is inevitable that at length conflict and contradiction will appear between God’s instruction and men’s invention. Herein lies the acid test – which of the two will prove pre-eminent and authoritative to those concerned? Sadly, it is a perilously small step from ‘laying aside’ to ‘casting out’, from relinquishment to rejection. Traditions once made equal to Scripture now take precedence, and are defended in open defiance of God’s Word.

“Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition” (verse 13). In the final analysis, those who act in this way dishonour Holy Writ, impairing its integrity and authority by their behaviour. Thus they render the Word of God ‘ineffectual’ – for how can the gospel be faithfully declared, when the commandments are so flagrantly disobeyed? How can the truth be adequately preached, when it is held in unrighteousness (cf Romans 1:18)?

Such words accurately describe the Episcopal Churches of the present day; churches which by their very titles owe their first allegiance to earthly nations, and own as their ‘head’ a mortal monarch, and not the King of Kings. Never was there a name more to be desired by the child of God than a Biblical ‘Non-Conformist’ – for to this course, every true saint is called: *“be not conformed to this world”* (Romans 12:2), nor to this world’s ecclesiastical organisations, or religious denominations.

Let none suppose that Mauro’s letter is solely a valediction against Anglicanism and its American counterparts. His convictions run far deeper, as he said: “I have withdrawn from that organisation and from **all** religious organisations”. Close behind the Episcopal Church comes the wide spectrum of other denominations, each claiming to have the fullest revelation of Truth, each purporting to be closest to the Biblical pattern, and superior to all other systems. Yet the distinguishable ‘denominations’ of christendom all have two fundamental errors in common. First, they were all established and defined by men, and consequently involve a combination of God’s commandments, and men’s traditions. Second, they all impose upon their component Churches and fellowships an additional level of organisation, which is nowhere to be found in Scripture. For men to take upon themselves the management of groups of Churches is an affront to the Great Head, who claims sole authority for Himself over every individual assembly of His people.

The only method of ecclesiastical administration warranted by Holy Writ is the self-governance and autonomy of every local Church. Each one independently is to be “*the body of Christ*” (cf 1 Corinthians 12), ruled by Him, and acknowledging Him as their immediate and only Head. “Names and sects and parties fall, Thou O Christ art All in All!”

Yet true Biblical Independency is itself under threat from a more insidious form of ecumenism. Today, under the guise of ‘unity’, men of widely differing persuasions and diverse backgrounds are to be seen sharing pulpits, and the platforms of conferences and seminaries. In order to maintain this tenuous fellowship and appearance of concord, their distinguishing teachings, and distinctive beliefs have to be suppressed or evaded. By this means, the clear demarcation lines between truth and falsehood are blurred, and error is the more readily proliferated.

This attitude and behaviour is endemic in many once faithful Churches: a stifling of the voice of truth, coupled with gradual removal of the ancient landmarks (cf Proverbs 22:28). For example, where today will one hear a rigorous defence of believer’s baptism, or of Headship and covering in worship? (cf 1 Corinthians 11:1-16). There is an ever-increasing region of doctrinal ‘taboo’ in preaching: to declare the Word of God pertaining to divorce and remarriage, or the celebration of festal days is anathema. Meanwhile the amount of teaching relegated by men to the status of ‘secondary truth’ continues to grow, to the confusion and detriment of Christians everywhere. Pulpits from which a vociferous non-conformist stand was once made, are now visited by men calling themselves ‘Reverend’, and even wearing clerical garb. Churches which once faithfully upheld the Law of God, now admit those whose belief and practice is a blatant contradiction of the Divine Mandate. Thus a double standard is created, and an ‘uncertain sound’ is given. This inter-church co-operation may be fashionable

at present, but a day is coming when God will call to account all those to whom His Lively Oracles, and the purity of His Sanctuary, have been committed.

The Divine commandment to Christians in every age is: “*Come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*” (2 Corinthians 6:17). The charge is one of secession from all that is at variance with God’s Word; and subsequently the avoidance of any contact with those former errors, lest there should be a contraction of guilt through association.

NOTICES

Lord’s Day 30th October 2005 was a joyful occasion, as the Church, together with friends and visitors, assembled to witness the baptism of Mrs Marie Power. Her admission into Church membership was effected the following week. Mrs Power has attended the services regularly over a period of several years, with growing interest and conviction. She is a precious and much valued addition to the Lord’s people at North Road Chapel.

The Church’s Ministering Elder of many years, Mr W. H. Molland, suffered a minor stroke at the beginning of August, necessitating a reduction in his duties. The weekly preaching services, and quarterly production of ‘*The Link*’ magazine are being maintained by the Assistant Minister.

Preliminary Announcement

ANNUAL BIBLE CONVENTION

Saturday 3rd & Lord’s Day 4th June 2006 D.V.

Preacher. Mr Tom Hill
(Borehamwood)