

*A Study in Pursuit of Reconciliation within the Body and Bride of Christ*



*And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of  
many generations; you shall be called  
the repairer of the breach, the restorer  
of streets to dwell in. - Isaiah 58:12*

### I. HOSTILITY

*"No foreigner is to enter within the balustrade and embankment around the sanctuary. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame for his death which follows." - inscription on the Soreg of the Temple*

*"For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." ~ Ephesians 2:14*

Within the temple complex at the time of the apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians, these words hung upon a balustrade in the court of the Gentiles. This wall was a secondary barrier to the temple itself and while Gentiles were not permitted to enter the inner complex and the court of women, this additional barrier represented the animosity and discord between Jews and the *goyim* (nations). The word Paul used to describe these sentiments and actions was the word hostility.

Hostility is an inner disposition and feeling that is expressed in tangible opposition and actions towards another individual or group. At the core of division in the history of the church is a foundation of hostility that exchanges the union and unity of the Triune God for enmity, a barrier to peace. This hostility manifests itself in the following ways:

***Tension, taking offense, insecurity, blame, willful blindness, competition, fear, harshness, defensiveness, exclusion, deception, manipulation, meanness, cynicism, self-will, pride, contempt, victim mentalities, slander, bitterness, jealousy, anger, revenge***

### II. THE ISSUES - CHURCH, TRADITION, & INTERPRETATION

Undergirding the divisive history of Christianity is a question of interpretation. How did the Gospel message and authority entrusted to Christ's apostles transfer after their lives to the church? What makes this all the more difficult is that the period between the apostles in the first century to the apologist of the 2nd century, is one of the least attested to periods of the faith. Ultimately how one interprets this period in-between, the period of the apostolic fathers, sets forth a vision and understanding of what the church is, who the church is, and the how the church is to operate in the world.

What makes this even more difficult is that each of the competing visions finds justification for its view from this period. For the Western church the emphasis would be on the role of apostolic succession, specifically through the see of Rome. In the Eastern church, influenced heavily by the writings of the Ignatius of Antioch (death ca. 110AD), the life of the church would be found in the bishop and each local community would be where it was the full church. Thus a more conciliar understanding developed in relation to the voice of the church as found in the bishops. With the rise of Protestantism in the 16th century, a challenge to the hierarchal understandings of these latter forms would come, giving greater

emphasis to authority via the sources, in this case that being the canon of Scripture as left behind by the apostolic messengers themselves.

The irony is that all three views find harmony with one other in foundational ways, only the distinct emphases of each over time giving way to a greater divergence of practice and understanding. It is important to note that in each particular view there is a unity in understanding an apostolic authority. The issue is how that apostolic authority is transferred and how it is to be held in the church.

The patristic period of the church can be understood in this way then:

- **Church** - Apostolic succession was a necessary argument for who held the true teaching of Christ, especially in light of the rise of Gnosticism which claimed to hold this teaching of truth. The question becomes how did this succession occur and what role and authority was it to hold in the church?
- **Creed/Rule** - The apostolic message as passed on to the church was held in its liturgy and via the baptismal confessions of the church through the *regula fidei* (rule of faith). It became the interpretive grid through which to interpret the apostolic message and writings. The question becomes does the rule, or summary of the faith, have an authority inherent within itself and how is it to be expressed in the life of the church?
- **Canon** - The apostles entrusted the message of the Gospel to the church via their writings, which over time came to be formally recognized in the canon of the New Testament. The question in relation to the scriptures is what role does tradition and the *regula fidei* hold, and how do they relate to one another?

The church through its succession of leadership held to the apostolic message in its sacred texts. These texts were to be interpreted by the church, but done so through the rule of faith which guarded the inheritance left behind by the apostles in the Gospel of Christ. It is necessary then to remember the dynamic interplay of this period and to identify the unique ways in which this unfolded in the history of the church, especially in light of the unique emphases of various traditions. Thus when looking at the issues that are to be highlighted when evaluating division in the history of the faith, the following grid is necessary:

1. **Authority** - Who is in charge, how did they get in charge, and what function is that responsibility to have in the life of the church?
2. **Tradition** - How does the Gospel of Christ get handed down from one generation to another?
3. **Interpretation** - How do we determine meaning and who holds that authority/responsibility?
4. **Culture** - How does the society in which the church is found give symbols meaning and also shape the amount of value given to specific emphases?
5. **Language** - How does language, with its limitations, articulate a living faith across cultural and philosophical boundaries?
6. **Institutions and the Heart** - This is a broader subject that may be best defined as issues of the malformed heart. Essentially it is the role that men and women play in the way they relate to one another, share or even hoard power, and how sin creeps into all that we are discussing.

### III. GOD'S RESPONSE - RECONCILIATION

God's response to hostility is reconciliation. He accomplished this by abolishing the dividing wall of hostility in Christ, making peace in his flesh. God is at work in Christ to not only bring us peace with him, but peace with one another.

- A. **A Process** – At the core of what reconciliation is, is the uniting of that which was never meant to be a part. Reconciliation then is a series of actions that removes hostility in a relationship, repairs the damage it caused, and restores its God-intended unity.
- B. **Active Agent** – Whenever reconciliation is presented in scripture, it is God who is the active agent in the process. Thus reconciliation centers in the work of God in world, specifically in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ.
- C. **Esse versus Ben Esse** – Missionary scholar, Lesslie Newbigin, describes unity as part of the *esse* of the church, meaning it is essential to its nature, just as holiness is. It is not a subsidiary part of the church (its *ben esse*), but who and what she is. Just as sin can be in the church, it is none the less holy, so the church, in spite of its divisiveness, is one. This means reconciliation is not an optional pursuit, but central to the life of Christ as found in the church throughout the ages.
- D. **The Exchange** - At the heart of the Gospel is a sacred exchange. Christ became sin that we might become the righteousness of God. That means that our hostility has been exchanged for the peace and unity of God, as found in our union with Christ. Just as our hostility is manifest, so also our reconciliation with God and one another in the following ways:

*Peace, patience, confidence, blessing, transparency, diversity, trust, gentleness, attentiveness, nearness, truth, serving, kindness, joy, sacrifice, humility, respect, responsibility, honor, tenderness, delight, confrontation, forgiveness*



*"The fact is that the differences between churches do matter. The question is not, 'How can we overlook these differences?' but 'How can we achieve a church which includes the many facets of truth?' True catholicity is not obtained by overlooking differences, but by accepting them and understanding them as a vital part of the nature of the church." ~ Robert E. Webber*



# TOPICS AND DEFINITIONS

## I. CHURCH OF NICEA

In the 4th century two significant councils arose that gave definition to the orthodox teaching of the church. The first, with collaboration from Constantine, met in Nicaea in 325 and was attended by a traditional estimate of 318 bishops representing faith in the empire. The creed of this council, the creed of Nicaea, was formed and then in 381 another council convened in Constantinople in response to Arianism, a movement suppressing the deity of Christ, and affirmed the original creed and expanded it to develop a fuller Trinitarian confession known as the Nicene Creed. This creed has been affirmed by Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, the Assyrian Church of the East, Oriental Orthodox churches, and most protestant groups. The church as we will be defining it is the church that can affirm whether explicitly, or implicitly by their practice, the Nicene Creed.

## II. APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

The church was built upon foundations laid by the apostles as they were entrusted by Jesus Christ himself to establish and defend his church. Apostolic authority thus is rooted in Christ but is the power to transmit the tenets and message of the Gospel and establish the church through means and forms in which it might be defended and sustained.

## III. REGULA FIDEI

Latin for the 'rule of faith,' also known as the canon of faith or the canon of truth, was the tradition of the church in its core doctrines and tenets and provided the guideline for orthodoxy in the early church. The *regula fidei* was a guiding force in interpreting scriptures, and though somewhat abstract and ambiguous in regards to the modern mind, was definitive enough to form an outline of what could be called the *theological canon of apostolicity*. The *regula fidei* could be located in the church's teachings, its liturgies, and in its catechetical practices.

## IV. CHURCH OF 3 BRANCHES

Traditional understandings of the church have been of it in an east/west paradigm, the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches and their derivatives. This fails to embrace the entire narrative of the faith and its global aspect and is based on an imperial model. It is thus necessary to define the church in three branches that can be broken down either by geography (Europe, Asia, Africa) or by language/culture (Latin, Greek, Aramaic/Syriac).

# CRITERIA FOR APOSTOLIC CONTINUITY

## I. A 3-FOLD VIEW

- A. Apostolic Scriptures - Inspired writings of apostolic precedent affirmed by the church/tradition.
- B. Apostolic Creed/Tradition - A summary teaching derived from apostolic teaching and scriptures forming the baseline for orthodoxy and thus a guiding force in interpretation and in defense of the Gospel.
- C. Apostolic Succession - The direct transmission of authority for the preservation and guardianship of the Gospel by the apostles to bishops who in turn would do the same.

## II. IN SCRIPTURE

- A. Scriptural Authority - 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 3:15-16
- B. Tradition - Jude 3; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 1 Corinthians 15:3-5
- C. Succession - 1 Timothy 6:20; 2 Timothy 2:2

*"The scriptural canon came about in its shape and content as an embodiment of the canonical tradition, and this tradition could only be legitimated by standing in unity with the teaching of scripture."*

*D.H. Williams - Tradition, Scripture and Interpretation*

## III. IN THE CHURCH FATHERS

- A. Clement - Late 1st century, Bishop of Rome
  - a. Succession - Referenced clearly and multiple times
  - b. Tradition - Recognizes a 'rule' handed to them
  - c. Scripture - References and uses scripture to defend his positions
- B. Irenaeus - 2nd Century Bishop
  - a. Succession - Through the apostolic sees, primarily focused upon the church of Rome.
  - b. Tradition - Direct reference to the 'canon of truth'
  - c. Scripture - Was the 'foundation and pillar of the faith.'
- C. Tertullian - 2nd Century Apologist
  - a. Succession - Guarded the deposit of faith which we in turn interpret scripture through
  - b. Tradition - Not just in the rule of faith, but also in its liturgical practices
  - c. Scripture - Has absolute authority and is true, but cannot be disconnected from the tradition.