

THE WORK OF THE CHURCH

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I

Our society is in a state of disintegration. The nation faces moral, social, economic and ultimately political collapse due to the deleterious consequences of the triumph of secular humanism and its acceptance as public truth (i.e. religion) by both our rulers and the people. As a result of this the Church faces a situation today that she has not faced since the days of the Roman emperors, namely a secular political system of government that acknowledges no God higher than itself and no law higher than its own, and that is increasingly hostile to the Christian faith.

Despite the recognition by some politicians that “society is broken” there is no consensus on what should be done to solve this problem, and it is becoming all too clear that the political ideologies and institutions that govern our society are unable to save us from the social disintegration that the secular humanist belief system has inflicted upon society. The only real answer to this situation comes from repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Only by turning back to God can our society be delivered from its present social disintegration and the growing disaster that looms before us. But Christianity does not work by magic. God works through his body on earth, the Church, which must be a living community of faith that demonstrates the practical reality of living as the Kingdom of God.

The Church is called to be a prophetic community, a society that functions across the whole spectrum of human social life, and through the witness of this life in words and action, i.e. by modelling to the world what society should be like, calls the world to repentance and faith in Christ. Only as the Church incarnates the gospel in this prophetic society will the Great Commission be realised.

But what does this mean practically?

In order to pursue this mission the Church must constitute herself as a functioning social order in the provision of the following services:

First, we must establish a Christian justice (or arbitration) system. In his first epistle to the Corinthians the apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthians for going before the pagan courts and for failing to establish competent law courts for settling disputes between Christians (1 Cor. 6:1–8). It is necessary for the Church to re-establish such courts today since the secular courts of the land are now subject to ungodly legislation and justice cannot be expected from them. The functioning of such courts would also be likely to have an influence far beyond the Church, as indeed was the case with the courts of the early Church.

Second, we must establish a Christian welfare system. This is taught in the New Testament, and of course the same principle was set forth as essential for the community of believers in the Old Testament. The Church is required to care for the genuine poor and help those in need who are not able to help themselves and do not have family to help them (Acts 20:35; Eph. 4:28).

Third, we need to establish a Christian medical system. Christ commanded his Church to preach the gospel and heal the sick (Mt. 10:7–8; Lk 9:2; 10:9). Wherever the missionary work of the Church has been established healing and the setting up of hospitals has accompanied the work. Preaching the gospel and healing the sick go together and always have done in the work of mission. This is no less essential today than it was in the past. Likewise,

Fourth, we must establish a Christian education system. The establishing of schools has been one of the foremost cultural works of the Church throughout history. In the work of missions education has always been seen as a vital accompaniment to the work of preaching the gospel and healing the sick. The Great Commission cannot be completed without it. We are commanded by the Lord Jesus Christ to *teach* all nations (Mt. 28:19).

These systems must function and be funded independently of secular provision. The Church must begin to function as a distinctive and independent counter-revolutionary social order.

II

This is what the Church did historically in the first few centuries of her history, and it was by functioning as a *society* in this way that the Church was able to transform the ancient Roman world as the society of late classical antiquity collapsed under the deadening weight of paganism and the Roman State's political secularism. The modern Church faces a situation that is not dissimilar to that faced by the early Church of the Roman Empire.

But the purpose of these endeavours should not be merely to provide for the Church's own members; it should also be to provide these services as an essential aspect of the Church's mission to the world, so that as this Christian social order grows it will displace and eventually replace the secular humanist social order that now dominates our society. As the secular order collapses, as it inevitably will and is already doing, the nation must be able to see the Christian faith as the only real answer to man's personal crisis and the Christian social order as the only answer to man's social crisis. Just as the Roman Emperors eventually realised that Christianity was the only real alternative to the collapse of Rome, so too our people and rulers must come to realise that only in the Lord Jesus Christ can man find salvation and that the Christian social order is the only answer to the disintegration of our society.

Of course evangelism is an essential part of the Church's response to this situation. But our call to individuals and to the nation to repent must be seen against the backdrop of the Church living in this way as a true society of faith, a Christian social order.

III

Another essential aspect of the Church's life is the gathering of believers for fellowship and worship. Non-believers perceive Church rituals as meaningless to their lives and society, largely because they are. They do not engage with the real world in any meaningful way. We need to replace these rituals with a Church meeting that revolves around the biblical pattern, namely the agape feast, the Christian Passover, a fellowship meal, which should be the context of the celebration of the Eucharist and around which the whole gathering should revolve. This is also an essential aspect of what it means to live as a prophetic community, a prophetic social order that calls the world to repentance, since by doing this we proclaim the Lord.

There are five elements, besides the celebration of the Eucharist in the context of the agape feast, that need to be incorporated into the liturgy of our assemblies:

1. Confession of sin

2. Confession of faith
3. Prayer
4. Proclamation of the Ten Commandments.
5. The reading of Scripture and teaching of the faith.

This is not meant to be an exhaustive description of what should happen when the Church assembles but rather a bare minimum if the Church is to be edified and built up in the faith and thereby equipped for the work of service. But ritual is not enough. Ritual for the sake of ritual does not build up or edify the Church, and this applies not only to high-Church ritual, such as the ritual of the Church of England, but also to the low-Church ritual of the Free Churches. What we confess, hear, pray for and proclaim in the Church assembly must take place in the context of real fellowship and be a true manifestation of that fellowship. This is why the Lord Jesus Christ ordained the Christian Passover, the Eucharist, in the context of a fellowship meal and why the early Church practised it in the context of a fellowship meal, the Agape feast. The Eucharist is a communion *feast*, and it should not be reduced to a rite performed by clergymen; rather, it should be a real fellowship event, a social gathering in which the community partakes of a shared meal.

The ministry of the Church must also be directed to men. The Church must teach men to be heads of their households and pastors of their families under God. The responsibilities of male headship should be taught and modelled by the Church for the world. This means that the feminist ideology that presently dominates the Church and virtually every aspect of Christian culture, and the effeminate role models that it has engendered in the life of the Christian community, must be abandoned and replaced by a biblical theology and the patriarchal role model of leadership that this produces.

When the Church begins to function in this way the evangelical invitation of non-believers, and particularly men, to join the Church will be meaningful and practical. It will produce two responses: many will be attracted and there will be growth, and many others will be incensed by it and will seek to attack the Church. But the Church will begin to transform the nation in obedience to the Great Commission. Given the situation we face today this is the only way forward for the Church if the Great Commission is to be fulfilled.