

THE REFORMATION IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND TODAY

"God offers to every mind its choice
between truth and repose. Take
which you please, you can never have
both."

Emerson.

Introduction

It is fair to say that many people regard talking about Reformation in the churches today as a waste of time. The hopeless state of the denominations, and the vast work of evangelism facing a handful of keen christian people demand that all available energy be devoted to the things that matter most - the preaching of the gospel and the winning of souls to Christ. To start people arguing about reformation of this or that in the churches today is to set christians fiddling while the rest of the world burns.

But this will hardly do - and for a number of very good reasons. In the first place, so many people have given their lives in the cause of reformation in the past. Is it possible to dismiss, with a wave of the hand, the hundreds who in Mary's reign were martyred for denying a particular doctrine of the Lord's Supper? Or the 50,000 men, women and children (900 of them in one village in one day) who were drowned for believing a particular view of Baptism? And then there is this further question - what is the reason for the appalling state of the churches today? Could it be that their refusal to continue the work of Reformation lies behind their present confusion and weakness. And again there is the undeniable fact that what goes on in church when Christians meet together vitally affects what goes on when they are separated in the world. The church is the nerve-centre for christian activity, and if something is at fault here, it will have its effect all along the line.

This means that the most important question that can be asked today - by both denomination and local congregation - is that question the prophets asked of Israel, Christ of the Pharisees, the Reformers of the Mediaeval Church - is the Word of God being emptied of its power as a result of adherence to human traditions, opinions and ideas? "Remembrance of the Reformation brings with it the reminder of the need of the Church of Christ for continual renewal and revival. Within such renewal there must be an honest search for present cleansing from error in doctrine and practice, and also scrutiny as to whether once again traditions of men are obscuring the purity of Divine Revelation. We need to go back to such revelation as contained in the New Testament and must beware of being content with unqualified acceptance of the teaching of the Reformers as if God had only spoken through them." ¹ There must be examination not only of the practices that have accumulated within the Church of England through the centuries, but also the practices endorsed by the Reformers themselves. It is quite possible that these men retained ideas that are at variance with the Word of God.

Evidence from Church History

In the sixteenth century we find three main groups within the Church. To the one side is the Church of Rome, in the centre the great Reformed churches, and on the other side the various Sectarian groups. The key to an understanding of the first is 'preservation', the second 'reformation', the third 'restoration'. Thus the Church of Rome does not look to the New Testament for any direction as to the government, ministry and worship of the Church, preferring to preserve the traditions

built up within the Church through the centuries. The Reformed Churches (with the exception of those stemming from Calvin) placed considerable value on the developing forms of church life but insisted on reforming these in the light of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith as outlined in the Scriptures. The definitive statement of this position is found in Article XX of the Church of England where it is stated that: "the Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authority in Controversies of Faith : And yet it is not lawful for the Church to ordain any thing that is contrary to God's Word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another." The Sectarian groups (and Calvinist) gave greatest weight in these matters to the testimony of the New Testament. In contrast to those who held that "the Church might warrantably introduce innovations into its government and worship, which might seem fitted to be useful, provided it could not be shown that there was anything in Scripture which expressly prohibited them others adopted a stricter rule, and were of the opinion that there were sufficiently plain indications in Scripture itself, that it was Christ's mind and will that nothing should be introduced into the government and worship of the Church, unless a positive warrant for it could be found in Scripture."² It is important to recognise here that for most of them Scripture was fundamentally a guide to principle and in that sense also an infallible guide to practice; not that it was conceived as a list of detailed precedents to be mechanically applied. They realised that allowances had to be made for changing circumstances, but would not endorse any alteration in the basic principles of government, ministry and worship.

The effects of these attitudes had their practical out-working in the differing structures of these three groups of churches. The Catholic Church retained the supremacy of the Pope, the sacrifice of the Mass, the doctrine of baptismal regeneration and so on. The Church of England dispensed with the authority of the Pope but retained the authority of bishops, abolished the sacrifice of the Mass but kept many of the outward forms of the rite, denied the doctrine of baptismal regeneration but practised general infant baptism. The third group denied the authority of bishops locating it instead in the local congregation, simplified even further the setting and administration of the Lord's Supper, and either restricted the sacrament of baptism to the children of believers, or replaced it with the baptism of believers only.

Within the Church of England each of these groups had its protagonists. Stephen Gardiner was a full-blooded representative of the first, and sought for nothing less than a complete return to the arms of Rome. The chief Reformers - Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer - belonged to the second group, but as shall be seen in a moment, to some extent at least were moving in the direction of the third position. Within that group others wished to go further - Tyndale had serious reservations about the validity of episcopal government,³ Hooper protested strongly against the wearing of any vestments,⁴ the exiled English congregation in Geneva,⁵ together with a

number of 'illegal' independent churches formed in England in the 1550's, agitated for the autonomy of the local congregation.⁶

The Reformers themselves, as has been indicated, were very much 'men on the move'. They refused to confine themselves to a closed system of thought and till their death were constantly moving their position as they in turn were moved by God through the Scriptures. The history of their continual enlightenment by the Word of God is an exciting one. Take, for example the differences between the Prayer Books of 1549 and 1552. There is Prayer for the Dead in 1549 but none in 1552; the Altar in 1549 but Table in 1552; indeed few realise that in 1552 Cranmer went so far as to suggest that one of the congregation should say on behalf of the other communicants, the Prayer of Humble Access. These men remained open to the teaching of the Word of God, and who knows where the Church of England may eventually have come to rest if the disastrous reign of Mary had not intervened.

The Elizabethan Settlement and the Book of 1559 were a victory very largely for the group in the centre. The Prayer Book was less radical (only in minor matters it is true) than the Book of 1552. In this it was a foretaste of things to come. The vital point, however, is this - instead of moving even further forward than the Reformers had moved in 1552, it chose instead a cautious retreat. The third group, now rapidly becoming the most active and vocal in the church, continued to express their dissatisfaction, and urged the completion of the work of Reformation.

"Then the congregation had authority to call ministers
 now the authority is given into the hands of the
 Bishop alone

Then (ministers) were admitted to their function by laying
 on of hands of the elders (of the local congregation) only
 now is required a vestment, a surplice, a pastoral
 staff

In those days (ministers) were known from others by
 learning and doctrine; now they must be distinguished from
 others by Popish apparel

Now titles, livings, and offices are given
 as Archbishop, Your Grace, My Lord Bishop, Archdeacon
 all of which are strange and unheard of in Christ's Church,
 nay plainly in God's Word are forbidden

Then ministers were not tied to any form of prayers
 invested by man, but as the Spirit moved them
 now they are bound by necessity to a Book of Common Prayer
 in which a great number of things contrary to God's Word
 are contained

These, and a great many other, abuses are in the ministry
 remaining, which unless they be removed and truth brought
 in, not only God's judgment shall be poured forth, but also
 God's Church in this realm shall never be builded."⁷

And so it was their opinion that "we in England are so far off from having a church rightly reformed, according to the precept of God's Word, that as yet we are not come to the outward face of the same." 8.

Both before the disappointment of the Hampton Court Conference of 1604 and afterwards, a number of such men began to leave the National Church. Those who remained within went on preaching quietly and positively and were not in the early seventeenth century as active in their protests as they had been before, and as they were to become after. But the persistent sense of dissatisfaction continued; the conflict was only postponed and not concluded. Our next stopping place is 1662. Once the Commonwealth had disintegrated the power once again lay with the restored bishops. These were not even men of the centre but men, like their mentor Archbishop Laud, who leaned distinctly in the "catholic" direction. Like the Reformers they were 'men on the move', but in their case in the opposite way. The 1662 Book gave a few minor concessions to the third group in the church in an attempt to conciliate them, but its overall effect was to move back even further from the position of 1559, and hence further still away from 1552. Till the production of that Book, and the Act of Uniformity that accompanied it, there remained some hope for the further reformation of the Church of England along scriptural lines. But what happened in 1662 was really the decisive point in the history of the Church. It marked "the final refusal to come to terms with the Continental Reformation."⁹ It was, in effect, "a complete victory for the Laudian Party in the Anglican Church."¹⁰ In the Elizabethan Settlement "the Reformation had been given a peculiarly English expression, and we may interpret the settlement of 1662 as an equally characteristic version of the counter-Reformation."¹¹

Every thinking man recognised that its inevitable result would be to drive many of the ablest and most godly of its members into schism. Such men could not remain because they would be forced to assent to things which they conscientiously believed to be contrary to their own conscience and to the Word of God. They had to agree that the three-fold order of Bishops, Priests and Deacons had existed from apostolic times; they had to assent to bury all persons, even the most profane blasphemers and utter over them words of christian consolation; they had to accept the wishes of all who brought their children for baptism; they had to take an oath of obedience to the canonical authority of the Bishop which involved their acknowledgment of the following measures:

"Canon 4 : Whoever charges the Book of Common Prayer with containing in it anything that is repugnant to Scripture, he is to be ipso facto excommunicated

Canon 5 : All are to be ipso facto excommunicated who affirm any of the 39 Articles to be erroneous

Canon 6 : All those are ipso facto excommunicated that should affirm that the rites and ceremonies of the Church

of England are superstitious

Canon 7 : All those are ipso facto to be excommunicated that should affirm that the government of the Church of England, by Archbishops, Bishops, Deans, Archdeacons, and the rest that bear office in the same, is repugnant to the Word of God.

Canon 58 : Every minister saying the public prayer, or administering the Sacraments, or other rites of the Church, is required to wear a surplice.... and that under pain of suspension.

Canon 68 : Ministers are required to baptise all children, without exception, who are offered to them for that purpose " 12.

They are left with no choice. On many of these matters God had spoken to them clearly through the pages of the New Testament. They must obey Him rather than men. And obey Him they did.

It is not too much to say that the Church of England has never since regained its greatness. Those who left in 1662 weakened its spiritual power to a tremendous extent, and ever since there has continued to be a steady procession of men leaving it for precisely the same reasons. The secession of the 2000 may prove in history to be the mortal wound, ironically inflicted upon itself.

Thus in the first hundred years of its life, the Church of England not only refused to complete the work of Reformation until the New Testament church had been restored in the land, but stepped back several significant paces from the position the Reformers had reached in 1552.

In the last hundred years other human traditions have made their appearance and these have taken certain sections of the Church further back than the Reformer's starting-point of 1549. Masses, Stone Altars, Vestments, Processions, Confessionals have again become commonplace. So have the spurious additional sacraments of Rome, together with their accompanying theology. In the last few years the use of Stone Altars in the place of moveable wooden Tables has been legalised. So has the wearing of the Mass Vestments. Prayer for the Dead is now a legal part of the Church's worship. Only recently a new communion service has received legal approbation, much of which harkens back to 1549 and before.

That brings us to the situation in the Church of England as it exists at this moment. Where do we move from here? There are only, or so it seems, three possible alternatives:

- (a) follow the lead of the majority and continue the return to mediaevalism.

- (b) preserve the status quo and remain further back in the shadows than the original Reformers.
- (c) press on and complete the task which they began, and if necessary going beyond their original intentions. It is to be recognized that this may have to be done at the expense of episcopal disapproval, 'legal' authority, and the ostracism of other evangelicals.

This third alternative is the only one that we can follow at this time, and this is so even in those areas of the Church of England where the same drastic developments that have been taking place in England have not as yet made their 'legal' consolidation. It is necessary to take seriously the words of a lesser known Reformer (often quoted but little practised) : "I charge you before God and His blessed angels, that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveal to you anything by any other instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as ever you were to receive any truth by my ministry; for I am truly persuaded, I am very confident, the Lord has more truth yet to break forth out of His holy word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of the reformed churches, who are come to a full stop in religion; and will go, at present, no further than the instruments of their first reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of His will our good God has imparted and revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it. And the Calvinists you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God. (The same could be said of many Anglicans in their attitude to the work of Cranmer). This is a misery much to be lamented; for though they were burning and shining lights in their times, yet they penetrated not into the whole counsel of God; but were they now living, they would be as willing to embrace further light, as that which they first received." ¹³.

Evidence from the New Testament

The only safe ground, and the only sure guide, is the New Testament itself. To the Church under the Old Covenant God gave explicit directions for its ordering and worship. On these matters He said to Moses : "You shall not add to the Word which I command you, nor take from it; but leave it unaltered as I commanded you." ¹⁴. To Joshua He gave similar instructions : "Be careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success." ¹⁵. The New Testament, no less than the Old, gives explicit directions as to the government, ministry and worship in the churches. Otherwise many sections of it become of little more than archaeological interest, and we may as well remove from our Bibles whole sections of the Acts of the Apostles, 1 Corinthians, 1 and 11 Timothy and Titus.

Without offering us a complete recipe or blueprint, these passages do give us the fundamental principles for the life of the church. Despite a certain amount of variety of emphasis we may still speak of the New Testament Church and the pattern it manifests in these matters.

Once it is claimed that the Spirit of God has added to the New Testament pattern further developments of church life which superseded its authority, the door is open for all kinds of ministries and orders that are unwarranted on New Testament evidence. It is indeed difficult to see how Anglican evangelicals can repudiate the Roman claim of development in matters of doctrine and practice, and yet apply the very same theory when they turn to matters of church government, ministry, worship and so on. It is not good enough to say that later situations and later difficulties occasioned the development of these different forms, and provides their justification (this is again in any case a 'catholic' argument), for there can be no doubt that the New Testament extends over a sufficient period of time for outward forms of organization to have emerged, and that Paul in any case founded churches which had to meet the very difficulties and situations that reared their head again the second century, and prepared for them by ordering these churches in a uniform way.

It is not possible here to set out everything the New Testament says about these aspects of church life. There is only time to indicate the main features of its teaching:

(a) church - apart from its application to the church as it is before God, ¹⁶. the word is used in the New Testament to denote the individual assemblies of believers. ¹⁷. Mention is made of the church first and foremost as a concrete something i.e., as the assembly of christians in a given locality. Their number and size is not decisive; even when two or three are gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ there is a church. In the one or two rare occasions where the word is used in a collective sense, it is not in any organisational or denominational manner, but still understood as consisting of autonomous local bodies. ¹⁸. So, for example, "the congregation at Corinth was in the eyes of St. Paul the Body of Christ (in that place) not a Body of Christ not part of the Body of Christ but the Body of Christ in its unity and filled with the fullness of its powers. It is in this one Body present in every Christian society that our Lord has placed His gifts which enable the church to perform its devine functions." ¹⁹. The word should never be used of the denomination, building or even institutional organisation at the local level, each of which are so often referred to by this term. The basic unit, the most important group, for the work of Christ is not, as the Theological Commission of the Toronto Conference falsely claims, the Diocese, but the local assembly of believers. And it is the creation and maintenance of such autonomous, self-edifying, self-supporting and self-propagating communities that is the most vital need today.

(b) unity - it has been indicated that only by strained exegesis can the word 'church' ever be taken in an institutional, organisational sense - much less applied in any denominational way - and in any case, it is clear that the churches are already thought of as one in Jesus Christ, with no suggestion that this will be more true if they are corporately organized. In the New Testament the 'unity' of the church is a truth to be believed,²⁰ a reality to be acknowledged, a fact to be maintained - in the local assembly by the demonstration of family love to each member of the congregation - and with other assemblies through ties of prayer, financial contribution, mutual ministry, hospitality, etc. The unity at both levels is that which a family has - between its own members within the home - and with those members separated from it by distance. The unity is no less real due to separation in a geographical sense. This kind of biblical unity is to be contrasted with the 'business' unity of the world which extends from the hierarchy down through the structure to the individual members at the bottom. "The method of carving out a visible Universal (or Denominational) Church by means of regulations affecting organisation and external form is not without its attractions which are irresistible to the mind of the lawyer type and training, such as we afterwards see in Cyprian of Carthage. It seems a short easy method of showing the whole church is visibly one. But it was not Paul's method. He nowhere prescribed a universal ecclesiastical policy still less did he teach that the universality of the Christian brotherhood must be made visible in this way. He regarded all the separate churches of Christ as independent self-governing societies. He strove to implant in all of them the principle of brotherly dealing with one another, and he dug channels in which the stream of the Spirit might flow in the practical manifestation of Christian fellowship." 21.

(c) authority - each congregation was considered to have both the authority and the ability to order its own life. Just as no christian person had the power to impose his ideas upon another about christian living (though he possessed every right and obligation to exercise moral and spiritual persuasion) so in the New Testament no one church, nor group of officials had any control of this sort over a local congregation. "The evidence for the independence and self-government of the churches to which St. Paul addressed his epistles is so overwhelming that it is impossible even to imagine the presence within them of any ecclesiastical authority with an origin and power independent of the assembly of the congregation, and the apostle does not make the slightest allusion to any such government or controlling authority, whether vested in one man, or a group of men. The apostle was so filled with the sense of high rank to which all Christians are raised in being called the 'sons of God', that in his view this sublime position makes all believers of equal standing no matter what spiritual gifts and natural abilities particular individuals may be endowed with. It was a natural and practical consequence of this thought that all believers should share the responsibilities of control in the community to which they belonged. So we find it as a matter of fact in the churches to which St. Paul addressed his epistles. He did

not write to ecclesiastical persons to whom the brethren owed obedience as to an authority different from, and superior to, the assembly of the congregation. He addressed his letters to the whole community who, in his eyes, are responsible for the progress and good behaviour as for the misdeeds and the decline of the society and of the individual christians within it." ²². His letters are quite consistent with the authority of elders within the congregation, and of those exercising ministerial functions, whose advice must be weighed. ²³. But they can in no sense impose their will upon the congregation. It is for the Word and the Spirit to do that. His letters are also full of his own advice to the community on a variety of matters, but it is always to the whole community that he addresses himself. ²⁴. He was conscious, as the founder of these communities, of his responsibility to guide and direct them. "He was careful therefore to answer any questions about difficulties which had arisen in the communities He was very careful to leave the full responsibility for the decisions to come on the shoulders of the society." ²⁵. Nor did the Jerusalem Council have such an external power. F.J.A. Hort pointed out that though New Testament Greek is well supplied with verbs of commanding, none of them is used here. They claim the guidance of the Holy Spirit; but this cannot be enforced on any other church (Paul, in fact, when often he might well have done so to settle a point, never alludes to it). "This is moral and spiritual authority; no more - and no less." ²⁶. Once the interim period of founding a church was over (and in most cases this occupied a very short space of time) it was considered that the Holy Spirit would equip the local congregation, with the assistance of its elders, and the advice of its apostle, for all that was necessary in its life and worship. In its hands lay the discipline of offending members; the place, time and mode of its worship; the handling of all its affairs, without the 'approval' or 'sanction' or 'authorisation' of some outside source.

(d) ministry - in each congregation the Spirit raised up its own ministers of the Word - prophets, teachers, givers of wisdom and knowledge and so on. There were usually several in each assembly and were not imported from without. ²⁷. Apart from the intermittent ministry of apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists (who, presumably, often were engaged in full-time ministry - though Paul at times resorted to a secular occupation) the congregation depended upon the Holy Spirit to minister to them through their own gifted men, and through the things that God had been teaching and revealing to each one of them. Worship was in fact a time of mutual ministry of the members to one another - one contributing a hymn, another a psalm, another a truth God had revealed, another a prophetic word, another a teaching, and so forth (1 Cor. 14:26). No liturgy governed their coming together, nor were their times of worship dominated by the activity of any one man. Not even the elders, or ministers of the Word, or visiting apostles, took it into their hands to arrange beforehand the form the meetings would take. The Spirit would do that. "What cannot fail to strike us in this picture is the untrammelled liberty of the worship, the

possibility of every member of the congregation taking part in the prayers and the exhortations, and the consequent responsibility laid upon the whole community to see that the service was for the edification of all. When we consider the rebukes that the apostle considered it necessary to administer, it is also somewhat surprising to find so few injunctions which take the form of definite rules for public worship, and to observe the confidence which the apostle had that if certain broad principles were laid down and observed the community was of itself able to conduct all things with that attention to decency and order which assured edification." 28. Lindsay adds, as have many others that "the meeting described by the apostle is not to be taken as something which might be seen in Corinth but was peculiar to that city; it may be taken as a type of the Christian meeting throughout the Gentile Christian Churches; for the Apostle, in his suggestions and criticisms, continually speaks of what took place throughout all the churches." 29. In any case echoes of similar meetings are found in Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, and 1 Timothy. Why, one might ask, the principle of multi-rather than mono-ministry? It constitutes a strong protection against the inroads of error; it best meets the different spiritual needs of the differing types of people in the church's membership; it is an effective deterrent against the Church glorying in or being built up on the ministry of one man; it guards against the church becoming an autocracy with one man at the helm; it proves enormous advantage in times of persecution; it greatly stimulates the church in raising up the spiritual gifts and so ministry of its members. The introduction of ministry of this nature, and worship of this character, would do away at last with the 'ministerial' caste, whereby even in the Protestant churches, as far as the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments is concerned, it remains a mediator between men and God. At last the final vestiges of priestliness in the Reformed churches would be swept away - all special titles, forms of address, types of apparel; and the principle of the priesthood of all believers (in ministry to one another, as well as in status before God, and witness to the world) would be established among us. As one theologian has said "Even in the Protestant church the clerical office continued in being as something constitutive for the existence of the Church. That the New Testament has no knowledge of such an office we have shown above ministerial office is the thing that most hinders the creation of true fellowship or brotherhood. It is the official character of the church above all which is the reason why the element of brotherly fellowship is so much lacking in the institutional church." 30.

(e) sacraments - the real, vital meaning of these will only be established when again they are set in the context in which one finds them in the New Testament. There are now stronger grounds than ever for holding that the early christians baptised only those who professed faith in Christ, and that baptisms by immersion was best suited to bring out the essential nature of the ordinance. 31. It was by baptism in this manner that a man responded to the gospel (a parallel may be drawn to the 'walking forward' at a Graham

Crusade) and indicated that his sins were washed away, his union with Christ through death to the old life, and rising to embrace the new. Baptism in this context (and I have witnessed it lately with my own eyes) is of great strength to the one undergoing it, challenge to those who are Christ's already, and penetrating witness to those who do not know Him. In the early Church also the Lord's Supper was not a separate, sacred, formal, liturgical act, but a simple, informal, homely supper set in the context of mutual ministry, edifying conversation, extempore prayer, fellowship and joy.³² "Originally the Lord's Supper was an act of fellowship non-cultic one might say almost everyday character By this simplicity of an everyday supper it is distinguished from the cult-rites of the mystery religions. As it was in early times experienced in the houses of the faithful, it was the hallowing of everyday living."³³ And so another Reformed writer warns that "when our present-day churches, therefore, with their contra-position of the one priest/minister and the many believers, must of necessity create the impression of engaging in cultic ceremonies, then this is certainly a point on which the New Testament church challenges us to a radical reformation of our thinking."³⁴ The full meaning of the Lord's Supper, the full reception of its benefits (especially of real fellowship with one another), and the real significance of its intent will never be recaptured until it is once again set in its intended context.

(f) evangelism. The phenomenal growth of the early church was due to the activity of its apostles and evangelists, and to a large extent the life and witness of individual christians. In our own time the first still occurs, and upon this many mainly rely, but it is the second that should be the way in which the Lord continues to add daily to his churches. This does not seem to happen despite all the activities and attractions which the 'church' provides for those outside, and despite all the encouragements that he should attend. The churches have become introverted, have built up their monastic-type communities and facilities, where 'keen' christians spend most of their time, to which they contribute most of their money, and on behalf of which send up most of their prayers. Few have any living, ongoing contact of a personal nature with those outside this set of activities. Instead of going out to take Christ to others wherever they may be, it spends its time, money, effort, and prayer and in trying to persuade others to come to it. Despairing of its efforts it creates chaplains to universities, to hospitals, to industry. It seeks to penetrate the political frontier, the cultural frontier, and all the other frontiers.³⁵ Everywhere the Church and its members understands itself as an "it" which stands over against the world, rather than seeing that it is only a fellowship, which, when dispersed, penetrates these frontiers, associates with these people, already. All this error stems from the basic misunderstanding as to what the church is, and what the church is for, an error which the Anglican Articles at basis substantiate. Let the church meet for fellowship as it did in the New Testament (preferably in a home, or a hired building, or at the most a homely and unexpensive building of its own) and then let it spend its money, its time, its effort, its prayer in going to those to whom Christ

has sent it, and who so desperately need Him. The luxury of introversion in which the churches, the denominations, and christians are engaging at this time, is one of the cardinal sins for which we shall be judged. This includes also the occasional ceremonies which it provides for those outside its number, such as indiscriminate baptism, marriage, burying, and blessings of various kinds. "In the New Testament people got married and people died; but to provide special procedures for that did not occur to the New Testament church and evidently was not deemed necessary by her. That certainly does not mean that on such occasions Jesus Christ would not be confessed as Lord and prayers might not be offered (when her own members were involved). But it is certain that things have become a dead business when the church shifts her weight to insisting that such occasions be accompanied by more or less religio - cultic ceremonies which are thereby woven into the life of man, instead of stepping in with the gospel of Jesus Christ which precisely does not want to consolidate man in this life but rather call him out of it to die with Christ that he may henceforth live a new life in Him." ³⁶. The New Testament had none of these 'offices', it had none of our 'organisations', it had none of our 'departments' or 'societies' and yet see what happened. "This then is what I mean by spontaneous expansion. I mean the expansion which follows the unexhorted and unorganised activity of individual members of the church explaining to others the gospel which they have found for themselves I know not how it may appear to others, but to me this unexhorted, unorganised, spontaneous expansion has a charm far beyond that of our modern highly organised missions (or churches) But men say that such relief can only be for dreamers, that the age of that simple expansion has gone by, and that in our own age such spontaneous expansion is not to be expected; that an elaborate and highly organised society must employ elaborate and highly organised methods, and that it is vain now to sigh for a simplicity which while it existed had many faults and infirmities, and, however attractive, can never be ours But if we, toiling under the burden of our organisations, sigh for that spontaneous freedom of expanding life, it is because we see in it something divine, something which we would gladly recover, something which the elaboration of our modern machinery obscures and deadens and kills." ³⁷.

Evidence from Christian Experience

There are some who feel that christian experience has demonstrated that such a pattern of church life would only be destructive to the growth and witness of the churches, and that such attempts have always failed. It is said that:

(a) such a structure is too flimsy to survive. But this is not so. It is the very structure that enabled the church to survive in the earliest days of persecution, and in more modern times elsewhere. Hence the lament of the C.I.M. missionary who had deplored Watchman Nee's setting up of churches on this pattern, that experience in Communist China has shown that this method is the best adapted

not only for survival, but even expansion. "Nor is there need, nor can there be hope, of imposing upon the Lord's ordering. He knew perfectly the purposes for which His church was to serve on earth, and knew fully the conditions amidst which it must work; and He instituted through His apostles the very best arrangements and methods for doing the intended work in the given conditions. To do otherwise is to impute folly to God." 38.

(b) no note is taken of the great progress in human society in the past twenty centuries (shades of Hooker). Change there has been, but again "it is a fallacy that conditions alter essentially or indeed at all, in relation to the business of the church of God. God changes not; His claims upon mankind alter not; the sinfulness of men remains undiminished; the work of Christ is an unaltered reality; the Spirit is as equal as ever to the task of convicting and regenerating the sinner; and the apostolic plan of church life and of christian service will be, has been found to be, divinely suited to every age." 39. Subsidiary organisations for communicating the gospel using new methods may occur, but the purpose of the church is meeting, and the purpose of meeting is fellowship, and for that purpose the New Testament is as contemporary as ever it has been. Only the incidentals of dress, language, custom, change with the times.

(c) a repudiation is required of the insights of many great men. But even the most learned, and saintliest can err, and one writer has urged that "never certainly has there been a case in which it has been more fully established by experience, that the foolishness of God is wiser than men; that what seems to many men very plausible and very wise, is utter folly, and tends to frustrate the very objects it was designed to serve. Of the innumerable inventions of men very plausible and very wise introduced into the government and worship of the church, without any warrant from scripture, but as professedly being indicated by the wisdom of human experience not one can with any plausibility be shown to have had a tendency to contribute to the best interests of the church." 40. Many examples could be given, but perhaps one will suffice. Three centuries ago John Owen prophesied that if the Church of England retained an unscriptural episcopacy within its government, then one day all the errors of Rome would re-enter it through this channel. This generation is watching that prediction come true.

(d) the structures of the church are peripheral matters, and not of central concern. The important thing is to preach the gospel and let these secondary interests look after themselves. "The Church is regarded as a field of evangelism in which the Gospel must be preached, and which must be revitalized by the coming of revival. The establishment of churches according to the Word is of little concern, and the effort to promote revival takes its place. Thus the preaching of redemption becomes an end in itself, and the full message of the Gospel which is concerned not only with the salvation of the individual, but with his relationship in the church and all that entails, is left half

proclaimed. We are not deluded into thinking that the preaching of personal salvation is no longer necessary, simply because the spiritually powerless and defeated lives of men and women all around us often happen to 'sport' a christian label, yet the existence of no less spiritually powerless and defeated organised Christianity has terribly deluded us into thinking that the preaching of the church is no longer necessary. The church exists, so that part of the Gospel no longer applies, we reason, when in fact, according to the standard of Scripture, the church may not exist at all, but only in name. It is apt to note how full was the message preached by the apostle Paul. By no means did he minimize the importance of personal redemption as basic to the whole of God's purpose, but he recognised that the consummation of God's purpose was in the church, and to leave it out of his message would be to be content with only half a Gospel. The history of the church aptly illustrates this, especially in the story of modern missions. Time and again a church has been produced which is not itself productive. A community has been created that has not the strength itself to beget others. Redemption has not been followed by the church, and the result is spiritual barrenness." 41.

This call, then, for a return to the New Testament, is due to the belief that in that New Testament God has set out the best and most effective way for His church to be ordered. The pattern of church life found therein is that which is best suited to build up the gifts and fruit of the local christians, secure the adulthood and independence of the local congregation, produce the most effective and powerful witnesses to Christ, and divert the maximum energy to the wants of a needy world. Rather than christian experience counting against the churches being ordered in this way, the very reverse is the case. The advantages (some already mentioned in passing) are numerous, especially with respect to:

(a) universality - "the simple apostolic injunctions have been found as workable today as in the first century, amongst converted savages and cultured Europeans, for every race and in every country. Of no other form of organisation can this be unreservedly said." 42. "Much of the weakness of modern missionary work (pointed out by Groves 150 years ago, and Roland Allen at the turn of the century, and only recently being admitted by those in missionary authority) is to be traced to the hopeless and unapostolic attempt to impose foreign, artificial, heirarchical structures upon communities to which they were alien and irksome." Small wonder that in many cases a century elapsed before the indigenious christians were 'ready' to continue the structure themselves. In some places they are not considered to be 'ready' yet. Contrast the attitude of Paul who in ten years established churches in four provinces of the Empire, and could at the end of that time speak as if his work were concluded, and could plan extensive tours into the far west without anxiety lest the churches perish in his absence for want of guidance and support.

(b) expansion - "the Lord and His apostles contemplated the rapid dissemination of the gospel and expansion of the church. The church was to be a mobile force. Such a force dispenses with all possible impediments. Complex machinery takes much time to construct and erect; it is long before it can be in running order. This forbids rapid expansion." 43. The simplicity of the apostolic assemblies met these conditions excellently, and still does.

(c) persecution - "the Lord knew that His church must be so constructed as best to endure the severe strain of extended periods of persecution the extreme simplicity of assembly organization was admirably suited to periods of oppression." 44. This has already been demonstrated. In places where persecution has occurred, it is usually the complex institutions and denominations that either collapse or are infiltrated by alien elements and weakened. Organized Churches suffer from State interference and restriction, whereas the others continue to survive (and thrive) underground despite all the hazards.

(d) spirituality - "here is a primary clue to God's methods. As is the power so is the machinery. The church of God in all its parts and working is intended for the manifesting of His invisible presence. With intention it is so constructed as to be unworkable save as He is present, and is free to maintain and employ it. Evangelistic labour is not intended to be fruitful save as the Spirit of God is its power; public worship is meant to be a fiasco apart from His immediate impelling and restraining it is the changeless tendency of the human heart to resort to visible material and mechanical measures in order to maintain a semblance of the real." 45. In apostolic times the absence of inter-congregational and extra-congregational organisation effectively delivered from this danger. For it is a scriptural truth that conscious reliance upon the Spirit (in both personal and corporate life) rather than upon rules and regulations, makes room for the mighty power of God.

There has been little quoting of Scripture in this article, (though note the profusion in the footnotes) and much quoting of others. The first is so because a complete study of the New Testament is really the only adequate way of demonstrating the extent of the evidence it offers for these views. The second has been the case so that it might be seen that there is a long line of witnesses who have testified to these same truths. At this stage, then, allow me to draw some conclusions of my own, and then to suggest some final quotations with which to conclude.

Conclusion

It was asked earlier what course must be taken in the light of the past and present history of the Church of England, and in the light of this scriptural teaching. I would suggest two courses:

(a) according to the extent to which they feel these things to be in accordance with the New Testament, both ministers and laymen should seek to move in the direction the New Testament indicates. Some may feel bound to do this only at the Episcopal, Synodical, and Hierarchical level that all their actions might have the stamp of 'legality' about them. I do not wish to be pessimistic, but I hold little hope for this course of action. Men within the Church of England have sought to follow this course for four centuries and have never succeeded. Others will seek to order their local congregations upon New Testament lines with or without the approval of those in positions of authority in the denomination. I regard this as a completely proper thing to do, provided it is done responsibly, charitably, and congregationally. The Church of England as a whole had every right to break from the Church of Rome at the time of the Reformation despite (from the Church of Rome's standpoint) the illegality of the procedure. The local congregation who feels the above things to be significant has every right to take to itself such privileges as belong to it by scripture despite (from the denomination's standpoint) the illegality of their action.

(b) others, like myself, who can no longer bear the burden of conscience that is entailed in remaining in the Church of England and thus openly asserting to its Articles, while inwardly disagreeing with it at almost every point, with great regret but at the bidding of Christ, will resign from it. They will seek to discover whatever sphere of ministry Christ has in store for them, and will either associate themselves with, or endeavour to build up themselves (according to gifts God has given them) a church on New Testament lines. Let each man be fully persuaded in his own mind of the step he should take. Both will be in danger of much criticism, for "today if a man ventures to suggest that there may be something in the methods by which St. Paul attained such wonderful results worthy of our careful attention, and perhaps of our imitation, he is in danger of being accused of revolutionary tendencies. Yet this is manifestly not as it should be. It is impossible but that the account so carefully given by St. Luke of the planting of the churches in the Four Provinces should have something more than a mere archaeological and historical interest. Like the rest of the Holy Scriptures it was 'written for our learning.' It was really intended to throw light on the path of those who should come after." ⁴⁶. And again, "the Church historian, with his eye on the later world-wide development of the ecclesia, must indeed name this first stage, and the idea of the ecclesia formed in it and for it, fantastic or 'utopian' yet we shall not hesitate to acknowledge it as the necessary outcome of Paul's understanding of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and therefore as the necessary norm for all time of the believing fellowship of Christians." ⁴⁷.

One final word, from a little known Reformer John Brown commenting on Christ's words to the Pharisees in Mt.15:12-13 "Then came his disciples, and said unto Him, Knowest not thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?"

But He answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up." He says : "Our Lord's conduct here shows us that we are not from the fear of giving offence to refrain from speaking the truth, especially with regard to doctrines and usages, sanctioned by Divine authority, which men endeavour to impose as articles of faith and religious observances, and by which they cast into the shade doctrines clearly revealed, and substantially make void ordinances clearly appointed by the Lord. It is no uncommon thing, when the truth on these subjects is spoken, however calmly, for persons to be dissatisfied and offended. And some very well-intentioned persons, like the disciples, are disposed to say, It is a pity - would it not have been better to avoid such subjects? But is the truth to be concealed? This would be, on the part of him who knows it, unkindness to his brethren, injustice to truth, treason against the God of truth. To all men we ought to avoid giving unnecessary offence. We ought to be ready to sacrifice personal comfort to a great extent, rather than incur this evil But we must not sacrifice one jot or tittle of Christ's truth to gain this or any other end the 'making void God's commandments by men's traditions,' we must clearly expose and strongly condemn however much we may love their persons, and value what is genuine in their Christian faith and character. This is kindness to them, as well as justice to truth. With regard to everything in the shape of religious doctrine, which we cannot find in the Bible - with regard to everything in the shape of religious institutions unsanctioned by divine authority - we must 'lift up our voices like a trumpet', and proclaim, whosoever may be offended. 'Every plant which our heavenly Father hath not planted' should - must - 'shall, be rooted up.'" 48.

1. H.R. Gough, ex-Archbishop of Sydney, Reformation Sunday Address reported in The Australian Church Record, October, 1965.
2. William Cunningham, The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation (1862) quoted in The Reformation of the Church, ed. I. Murray, p.38.
3. W. Tyndale, The Practice of Prelates, 1530, reprinted in Tyndale's Works, (Parker Society), 1849.
4. John Hooper, The Regulative Principle and Things Indifferent, translated into English for the first time in The Reformation of the Church, ed. I. Murray, pp.53ff.
5. Seen in the Preface to the Genevan Service Book, 1556, reprinted in The Reformation of the Church, ed. I. Murray, pp. 72ff.
6. E.H. Broadbent, The Pilgrim Church, p.239. Records of such assemblies can be traced back till at least 1523, and must have extended back much further.
7. Thomas Wilcox, The Necessity of Reformation, quoted in The Reformation of the Church, pp. 86ff.
8. Thomas Wilcox, The Necessity of Reformation, quoted as above p.85.
9. Martin Lloyd-Jones, article in Faith and a Good Conscience, Puritan Papers (1963), p.67.
10. R.S. Boshier, The Making of the Restoration Settlement. This opinion has been endorsed by no less an Anglican historical authority than Dr. N. Sykes.
11. Martin Lloyd-Jones, Faith and a Good Conscience, p.67.
12. Edmund Calamy, The Grounds of the Nonconformity of the Ministers who were Ejected, quoted in The Reformation of the Church, ed. I. Murray, pp. 162ff.
13. John Robinson addressing the Pilgrim Fathers in 1620, prior to their departure for the New World, quoted in J. Fletcher's History of Independency, Vol. III, p.69.
14. Deut. 4:2.
15. Joshua 1:7-8.
16. E.g., Mt.16:18; Eph.1:22-23; 5:23ff; Col. 1:18; Heb.2:12; 12:23.
17. E.g., Mt.18:17; Rom.16:5; 1 Cor.7:17; 11:16; 14:4; 14:33; 16:9; II Cor. 1:1; 8:1; 8:18; 11:28; Phil.2. A concordance needs to be consulted to appreciate the multiplicity of the references. The above are a very small sample of the total number conveying this meaning.
18. Thus we have reference, for example, to 'the church of Judaea'. But this would include many individual churches within it. A similar reference is that to the 'whole' church gathering together in Corinth. We know for certain there that churches existed in houses which one assumes sometimes met as a unit. But neither of these examples provide illustration of organisational attachment.
19. So T.M. Lindsay, the noted Reformed scholar and historian, in The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries, pp.14ff.
20. Eph.4:4ff. etc.
21. T.M. Lindsay, The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries, p.20.
22. T.M. Lindsay, The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries, pp.58ff.

23. There were such a group in every congregation once it had been established, and there were always a number to whom were committed this function - Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2; 15:6; 15:22ff; 16:4; 20:17; 21:18; Phil.1:1; 1 Tim.5:17; Tit.1:5; James 5:14; 1 Pet.5:1.
24. See especially in this connection the evidence set out in Matt.18:15-20; 1 Cor.5:1f; 1 Cor.11:1ff; 1 Cor.14:1ff; Rev.2:3 et al.
25. T.M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, pp.89ff.
26. *Liberty in the Lord*, A Symposium, Carey Kingsgate Press, p.12. Cp. the translation 'resolution' in Moffatt, RSV and NEB.
27. The evidence is simply overwhelming - see, for example, Acts 13:1; 20:28; Rom.12:6-8; 1 Cor.12:8ff; 14:1, 5, 26ff; Col.3:16; Eph.5:18ff; 1 Thess.5:11; 19-21; Heb.10:25; 13:17; 1 Pet.4:10.
28. T.M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, p.49.
29. T.M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, p.48.
30. E. Brunner, *Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p.99.
31. See especially R.E.O. White, *The Biblical Doctrine of Initiation; Christian Baptism*, ed. A. Gilmore, but most of all G.R. Beaseley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*.
32. E.g., Mt.26:17-30; Lk.24:28-31; Acts 2:42; 20:7ff; 1 Cor.11:20ff.
33. E. Brunner, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p.63.
34. Article "The Challenge of the New Testament Church" in *International Reformed Bulletin*, Nos. 20-22, p.17.
35. The Toronto Conference Documents (especially their 'theological' ones) and many other recent statements, are riddled from top to bottom with this type of thinking.
36. "The Challenge of the New Testament", *International Reformed Bulletin*, Nos. 20-22, pp.20-21.
37. Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Churches*, pp.7-8.
38. G.H. Lang, *The Churches of God*, p.9.
39. G.H. Lang, *The Churches of God*, p.9.
40. W.Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (1862), quoted in *The Reformation of the Church*, ed. I. Murray, p.40.
41. J. Kennedy, *The Torch of the Testimony*, p.235.
42. G.H. Lang, *The Churches of God*, p.32.
43. G.H. Lang, *The Churches of God*, p.33.
44. G.H. Lang, *The Churches of God*, p.33.
45. G.H. Lang, *The Churches of God*, p.35.
46. Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods - St.Paul's or Ours?* p.4.
47. E. Brunner, *Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p.46.
48. J. Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of our Lord*, Vol. I, p.499ff.