

The
Apostate Church

AS SEEN BY

Buff Scott, Jr.



The
Authentic Church

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Olan Hicks

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BUFF SCOTT, JR.

[Columnist - Author – Reformer - Defector]

*A Defector of the Contemporary Church Opens up her Blemishes
and Transgressions and accuses her of being a Counterfeit
copy of what Jesus Founded*



The Authentic Church

OLAN HICKS

[Preacher - Author – Editor - Lecturer]

*A Promoter of the Biblical Church Discloses that Jesus
did indeed Found His Church and that
it can be Identified Today*

[March, 2007]

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17)

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Buff's

Introductory

My career in the bowels of Churchianity began when I was but a youngster. I was indoctrinated at an early age. When I was 26, I was “called” to my first church as pulpit minister. That was a giant step for a hillbilly who was born and brought up in the *Appalachian Mountains* of Eastern Kentucky, one mile from where the Hatfield-McCoy feud began.

Mom was a Hatfield before she married Dad. I was four years old and rocking my pet cat in the old rocking chair on the front porch of our shack when I watched a man shoot another man down, 20 feet in front of me. The impact of the bullet made him sick instantaneously and he fell to his knees and threw up. I screamed and ran into the house. As the bullet missed his heart, but barely, and lodged in his rib cage, he survived. But he never again “trespassed” the shooter’s wife.

Such was life in the *Appalachian Mountains*. Dad did some bootlegging when I was a kid, but surrendered his unprincipled lifestyle and embraced Jesus when I was about 11 years old. He threw his cigarettes and bottle of moonshine whiskey in the same creek he was immersed—and never touched them again.

Having been a child of partisan religion a big part of my life and served many of her churches as pulpit minister, pastor, orthodox leader and teacher, I want to tell you in this undertaking *why* I deserted Churchianity and became a free man in Jesus. Inasmuch as the clergy—“chief priests and elders”—have no control over my life, my thinking, and my teaching, I can tackle this endeavor without interference from the ecclesiastical “powers that be.” I assure you, I am no longer one of their puppets.

Buff's Introductory

Let me say at the outset that I love and respect my spiritual brothers and sisters, in spite of their loyalty and addiction to Churchianity. They are my brothers and sisters and I have not rejected them. I have rejected the *system* that has them enslaved.

I can identify with them, for I was once as they are. Like them, I too believed Jesus authored a church. I preached my brand of church on the sidewalks and from many pulpits. I pressed her upon others. I strove to win converts to her ranks. I was totally sold on the concept that Jesus redeemed her with His sacrifice. I felt that King James' Romans 16:16 and other related scriptures were pure gold. I equated "church" with God's new reign and defied any man to show otherwise. Like my churchly brothers and sisters, I used the same arguments, affirmed the same theology, advocated the same principles, and quoted the same scriptures.

It was 1976 when, after careful evaluation of and research into institutional religion, I concluded that Churchianity was not the solution to sin, or to the world's problems. I discovered that institutional religion and the contemporary church were introduced by men who envisioned their answers to life's problems more profound than God's. The stream flowing from the river of life was pure and tranquil before religion and church contaminated it. It is my sentiment that God has been replaced with Religion, and Jesus has been substituted with Churchianity.

My prayer is that God will rescue the apostate church from the sea of partisan tribulations and set her on a course of reformation.

[My half of this book is really a continuation of "**Mad Church Disease**," a book I authored recently. If you'd like a copy, contact me at my Postal or E-Mail addresses, listed on the title page of this book. I also write a weekly column under *Reformation Rumbblings*.]

Olan's

Introductory

I was born in Judsonia, Arkansas on November 3, 1927, the seventh of nine children. We were raised in a Christian home. We grew up in Arkansas during the Great Depression of the thirties. Money was scarce and it was a struggle just to keep beans and potatoes on the table. Both my parents worked hard in a home-based business, photography, watch repair, and film developing. People often paid in eggs, butter, and meat, which to us was as valuable as money.

When I was 8 years old a man who had some work done by my father overpaid him by ten cents. Dad would not go to bed until he walked across town to that man's home to return that dime. When dad bought a car on "time payments," the dealer said, "No papers needed. I'd rather have your word than any contract ever written."

I also experienced a similar attempt to be completely honest in spiritual matters, especially in the handling of the Bible. We were part of a little church out in the country, where only one cup was allowed on the communion table, classes were not allowed, and we had no preacher. Several men shared the teaching work. This was done because we thought the Bible mandated it. Dad taught more than the others, presumably because he was better educated.

The concept of grave responsibility to the written Word was basic to us. We felt we must study honestly and distinguish between what the Bible says and what men think. Later, as an adult, this approach, thoroughness, and objectivity led me to reject the "one cup" tenet, the "no class" precept, and the "no located preacher" idea. I still hold that deep respect for the word of God as the final authority.

Olan's Introductory

In 1942, when I was fourteen, our family migrated to Michigan, where jobs were more plentiful. There I met and married Barbara, and we raised three children. My training was in electronics. In the mid fifties, I worked in a TV service shop. But I was “roped” into filling a pulpit because there was no one else to fill it. For three years, I worked in the service shop, preached, and taught midweek classes. When I decided to preach full time, I had to burn a lot of midnight oil, taking classes where I could, and getting help from more experienced men. I was fortunate to have some of the best scholars to take an interest in me, and they helped a lot. I was able to put together an adequate education in Bible and in topics related to it.

So I'm not a product of any church seminary, nor am I tied to any partisan theological slant. I am tied to the lordship of Jesus, as revealed in the Bible. I am committed to the idea that the wisdom of God is as far above the theories of men as the heavens are above the earth. In 57 years as a minister, I have often seen the futility of man's reasoning demonstrated. Every group says, “We have the right answers. Come with us and you will have the truth.” The fact is none of us will ever “get it right” until we say exactly what God's word says. *“Test all things. Hold fast to what is good”* (1 Thess. 5:21).

According to the scriptures, one of the greatest pitfalls is a lack of objectivity. Satan uses prejudice effectively. Paul said many perish “because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10). Don't judge a doctrine by whether or not you like someone who represents it. One thing is important: Either the Bible says it or it doesn't. James said we should pray for wisdom (James 1:5). May God help us to use it rightly.

BUFF'S FIRST ESSAY

To lead up to what I want to say, allow me to disappoint some of you by revealing that I have little respect for the *King James Version* of the scriptures, believing its dialect to be extinct and its errors numerous. Of course there are errors in every translation, but the KJV seems to contain more than most of the others—unless it would be the version used by the *Jehovah's Witnesses* cult.

“CHURCH” AND KING JAMES

Most believers say their “church” was ushered in about A.D. 30-33, as chronicled in the Book of Acts, chapter 2. However, the KJV has one under Moses in Acts 7:38, and another one under David in Hebrews 2:12. The point is, Jesus did not introduce a church—*any* church, then or later. This statement will ruffle the feathers of some of you who are churchly-addicted, but please hear me out before you turn me off.

“Church” is not a translation of the Greek *ekklesia*. The Greek term is correctly translated congregation, assembly, called-out ones, and may even be rendered “community.” Moses led a congregation of chosen ones under the old era; Jesus leads a congregation of chosen ones under the new era. But neither Moses nor Jesus led or is leading a church or religious party.

KING JAMES' BLUNDERS

Prior to King James' scholars translating the Greek scriptures into what is known as *The King James Version*, he instructed them, “The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, as the word church not to be translated congregation” (*The Christian Baptist*, Vol. 2, Number 4, Nov. 1, 1824). The King insisted that all ecclesiastical terms be retained. “Church,” “Easter,” “baptize,” and “Bishop” were a few of his

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preferences. King James was King and Head of *The Established Church of England*. To permit his translators to deliver the Greek *ekklesia* correctly would have placed him in the position of being King and Head of a mere congregation. Apparently, he wanted no part of that. Today's church has picked up where King James left off

As noted, "church" is a misnomer and a distortion of the Greek *ekklesia*. The early believers never used the term. "Mad church disease" developed centuries later. It is tragic that we are so afflicted with "churchitis," considering that in the Greek Jesus did not say in Matthew 16:18, "I will build my church." Nor did Paul say in Romans 16:16, "The churches of Christ greet you." Yet we seem to be bent on fostering King James' blunders. Instead of trying to recapture the vocabulary of the Holy Spirit, we insist on promoting the mistakes of a bungling, "divine right" king.

In the beginning there existed only one body of believers, as opposed to hundreds of churches today, and it was composed of all of those who had accepted Messiah Jesus as their Savior and Redeemer. There was nothing to join. The King of kings (Jesus) added them to the new arrangement the moment they were born anew (Acts 2:47).

LET'S JOURNEY TOGETHER

As we probe the many perplexities of the contemporary church, I ask you to make this voyage with me. We will ascend the earthshaking problems that have engulfed her and assail her fortifications in an all-out effort to rescue her from the "fleshpots of Egypt." But should she refuse our mission, we will leave her to the clergy—the "Pharaohs"—who have long enslaved her.

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The kingly clergy nailed our Lord to a Roman tree (Matt. 27:20). They preferred to murder the Prince of Peace than abandon their religious parties. The scene would not change should Jesus walk the earth today in the flesh. Mega-church and TV “evangelists,” Pulpit Ministers, “Reverends,” and partisan Pastors would “run Him out on a rail” than surrender or reform their churches.

CHURCH PSYCHOSIS

There has never been but one community of believers. All redeemed sinners are citizens of that one community. But since the birth of “church,” that one community has been fragmented into sects or religious parties too numerous to count.

Alexander Campbell’s plea in the early 1800s to unite the Christians in all the sects is as meaningful now as it was then. His was a noble proposition that has long been forgotten by the sectarian church. He did not call for a unification of churches. He called for a reunification of all believers who were at that time entangled in and controlled by the partisan spirit. He well knew the partisan spirit had divided God’s community and that only a recommitment to the Spirit’s admonitions would reunite them.

It is interesting that in Campbell’s *Living Oracles*, his personal translation of the new covenant scriptures, he never once used “church” as a translation of the Greek *ekklesia*. His knowledge of the Greek language prompted him to leave “church” out of his version. I’m convinced Campbell knew that “churchitis” had divided God’s people into warring camps and that only a renouncing of “mad church disease” would reunite them.

When the inspired writer commissioned his fellow believers to

“love the brotherhood,” he included every born-again believer upon the face of the earth—then and now. That one brotherhood was and still is the one community founded by Jesus the Christ.

Our contemporary churches were not alluded to, and that includes the Baptist Church, Church of God Church, Assembly of God Church, the *a cappella* Church of Christ Church, Methodist Church, Lutheran Church, Catholic Church, Presbyterian Church, and all of the other religious parties in our current panorama. Not one of these divisive creations was part of the first century setting. They evolved later.

True, there were many sects or religious parties in those days—the sect of the Pharisees, the sect of the Sadducees, and others. But they were not included in the brotherhood of Christian believers. The early brotherhood embodied even those believers who might have continued their membership in religious parties upon accepting Jesus as their Messiah, but the parties *as such* were not God’s community. To put it another way, factional or divisive *systems* were not and are not part of the redeemed community.

PARTISAN RELIGION & GOD’S REIGN

Ambassador Paul was a zealous partisan, a Pharisee (Acts 26:5). He abandoned this separatist religion to live for Jesus. Even today, the redeemed community includes believers who are still caught up in the web of Churchianity, for God’s children are scattered over the hills and valleys of sectarianism. However, God’s new reign stretches far beyond the borders of any sect, church, religious party, or cult. Churchianity reigns over a restricted territory. God’s reign is universal! Partisan believers will never be free until they give up their allegiance and addiction to churches and submit to

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deprogramming in the hope of “drying out.” And while it may be wise to remove the apostate church entirely and start over, considering how grave “mad church disease” has plagued her, nonetheless many of her children may choose to remain where they are and work for reform. This is not always possible, however, because the sectarian church “would rather fight than switch.” Reformers are not always welcome within her ranks. They are usually accorded the “left boot of fellowship.”

Martin Luther wanted to work within the Roman Catholic Church for reform, but the scandalous Vatican would have no part of it. Instead, they sought his life. He escaped the “Holy See’s” murderous hounds, but the sinister Vatican continued their efforts to find him and “do him in.”

It was Luther who begged his followers not to call themselves Lutherans but simply Christians, saying that he had not been crucified for them. And because his disciples did not heed his plea, the Lutheran sect has become an integral part of the divisive plight within the Christian community. But this is the history of all noble movements that become entangled in partisan, rival affairs. Their affections no longer revolve around celestial affairs but are centered on building up the party. The world drifts farther into a state of darkness while institutional religion organizes, plans, scrutinizes, and develops new ways to increase the size of her sects and enlarge her church coffers.

WHY DID JESUS DIE?

Let it be understood that Jesus did not die for religious parties, churches, denominations, or cults. Instead, He died for Jews, He died for Gentiles, He died “for all the scattered children of God, to

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bring them together and make them one” (John 11:52). Jesus is not interested in uniting churches, denominations, and cults. He’s interested in uniting all of God’s scattered children, wherever they are, to bring them together into one body of believers, “so that they may be united as we [Son and Father] are united” (John 17:11).

Let it be said again: *Religious factions that march under partisan labels were founded by men centuries after Jesus ushered in His new reign.* As noted earlier, these include the Baptist Church, Methodist Church, Church of God, Church of Christ, Assembly of God, Catholic Church, Christian Church, Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church, and all of the others.

If I might ask: To *which* of the above churches is Jesus aligned? *Which* of the above churches did Jesus found? Did He establish and authenticate all of them? If yes, what was the purpose, then, of the Apostle Paul’s question to the Corinthian believers, as per 1 Corinthians 1:13? He asked them, “Is Christ divided?” If Jesus authored all of our schisms, He is indeed divided! And if He is divided, why would He then pray for unity among God’s children, as recorded in John 17:6-25?

But another question: To *which* of the above factions were Paul, Peter, John, and other apostles associated? The answer is obvious: *None of them.*

Let’s tell it like it is. If Jesus ascended to heaven without being a Baptist, and He did, and if Paul, Peter and others were taken to paradise without being aligned with any of the above denominations, and they were, I, too, can enter paradise without being a Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Mormon, Roman Catholic, Muslim, Church of Christ proponent, Jehovah’s

Witness, or without being tainted with any of the other partisan colors. I think I'll just be a "believer at large"—a Christian only. Surely that will be sufficient. God's grace will fill in the gaps, if any need to be filled.

KING JAMES AGAIN

It is not really necessary that we deal with the Greek language to detect the errors of King James and his scholars. Here is how he translated Acts 7:38, "*This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness.*"

The modern church says she did not exist prior to the death and ascension of our Lord. But here we have a church under Moses. This cannot be adequately explained without admitting that King James and his scholars made a *deliberate* mistake. Another example is Hebrews 2:12. In this passage, King James has a church under the reign of David.

No tossing of the coin will relieve the apostate church of these dilemmas. She ought to confess that Jesus did not author a church—*any* church. Should she confess that Jesus did not found a church, the conclusion follows that churches are sects or religious parties. And I assure you Jesus is not the founder of sects or religious parties. He founded the one body of believers, as per Ephesians 4:4, but that one body is splintered into sects and factions too numerous to bother counting.

What, then, is the solution? *Dismantle and dismiss all of our factional creations and march together under the banner of Jesus the Messiah!* If our flag bears anything other than the blood of our Lord, it is an apostate flag. The only flag I will ever fly again, and

the only label I will ever wear again, will portray Jesus the Messiah. All other flags and labels are bogus. To wave any other flag, whether Baptist, the *a cappella* Church of Christ (my “mentor” church), Church of God, Assembly of God, Methodist, or Catholic would compromise my relationship with my Lord and jeopardize my allegiance to Him. I will have no part of it.

THE PARTY SPIRIT vs. REFORMATION

Like all divisive entities, the apostate church contains many beautiful people whose only wish is to follow their King and Shepherd in all areas of the Christian walk. I do not entreat them to leave the ones they love and start a “loyal church”—whatever that is. I entreat them to bid farewell to the sectarian party spirit and launch a ministry of reformation within the confines of their own church environment.

The reason it is not necessary that reformed believers leave behind the ones they love to surrender the party spirit is because the sectarian spirit is a separatist attitude. They may choose to remain where they are and work for change. Many believers who are entangled in partisan religion would happily abandon the party spirit in favor of reformation and freedom if someone were available to lead and teach them. May God send reformers to harvest them.

OLAN'S FIRST ESSAY

"If it is of God you cannot overthrow it, lest you even be found to fight against God" (Acts 5:39). Gamaliel said this to Jewish leaders who were opposing the apostles. These were the first rejecters of the church. They claimed to be faithful servants of God, but in reality they rejected authentic appointments of God. That it was the church they opposed is seen in statements such as Acts 8:1, *"At that time a great persecution arose against the church at Jerusalem."* Later, the apostle Paul looked back on his involvement in this and saw himself as the chief of sinners. He said, *"I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it"* (Gal. 1:13). Trying to destroy the church was very wrong.

IS HUMAN REASONING A RELIABLE STANDARD?

Those who reject the church today rationalize a lot and think of themselves as servants of God. It seems their lack of respect for scripture is not just toward the *King James Version*, but toward all scripture. I believe God's word is our guide. I do not rely on any translation entirely. I read the Greek text itself to determine what is from God and what is not. I suggested to Buff that the scriptures are the only and final authority and he replied that many have tried to use that standard and it did not bring unity. He said, "The standard is Jesus the man." Is that Jesus apart from His word?

"The way of man is not in himself. It is not in man that walks to direct his own steps" (Jer. 10:23). To illustrate: God's word commands, *"Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together"* (Heb. 10:25). That is God's directive. But there are no scriptures specifying that this assembling must take place in small groups in homes and not in a building. Therefore, that is *not* God's directive.

How about this for some illogical thinking? "The scriptures have not brought unity to all believers. Therefore, the scriptures are

not reliable as a standard.” Or this, “Men have distorted the church and perverted it. Therefore, the whole concept of ‘church’ is wrong and should be discarded.” Typical of the “no church” reasoning is the idea that since King James ordered that certain words be retained in his 1611 Version, those words have to be wrong. Does that compute? Another is, “The idea of having a minister evolved into the modern ‘clergy’ system. Therefore, it is wrong to have a minister.” I say again, man’s “logic” is not above the wisdom of God.

CONFUSION ABOUT THE WORD “CHURCH”

Since our discussion is about “the church,” we will need to look into that word. Mistakes are being made, which lead to wrong conclusions. First, note that the New Testament was written in *Koine* Greek. What was written in Greek had to be translated into English so we could read it. To understand what the Greek says, English words need to be used.

In the Greek testament, the word “ekklesia” means “called out.” Since the word “church” is not defined as the “called out,” it is argued that it does not properly translate “ekklesia.” Is that really the case? Is there a better English word to use? Some suggest “congregation,” but that does not allow for the universal body. Mistakes are being made in the use of both words. “Ekklesia” is not itself a religious word. In scripture it refers to non-religious gatherings, as well as religious ones. In Acts 19:38-39, the town clerk told a mob to bring their accusations before a “lawful assembly” (*ekklesia*). After talking to them he “dismissed the assembly” (*ekklesia*). So in the Greek text, “ekklesia” is not a proper noun, or name. Jesus built something consisting of people. He called them out and called them together. Whatever expresses

that idea is right to translate “ekklesia.”

The word “church” is also being mishandled. Most of our words are from roots in other languages such as Greek, Latin, or German. But the words are defined according to their usage here, not necessarily the usage of their country of origin. The word “church” is probably from German roots. The dictionary I use, *Webster's New Riverside University Dictionary*, gives eight definitions, seven of which are incorrect. The first one reads, “CHURCH #1: The company of all Christians considered as a mystic spiritual body.” The number one definition agrees with the biblical account of what Jesus built. According to that definition, we can biblically say that Jesus built a church. I do not know of another English word that is defined, “The company of all Christians,” as the word “church” is.

The fact that multiple definitions are given indicates that people have various concepts of what a church is. So we have to explain it. But that would be the case regardless of what we choose to call it. The confusion comes from distortions in practice, not from the word itself. In the time of Moses and of David there was indeed an *ekklesia* in the sense of God’s “assembly,” which the KJV renders as “church.” The text does not say, “A church of Christ.” That did not exist back then. Incidentally, Alexander Campbell did not reject the word “church.” He did not translate *Living Oracles*. In his own writings, he used “church” profusely.

Its *function* is more important than what we call it. In studying the Bible on what Jesus built (“ekklesia”), we find that its functions are emphasized, not what we must call it. The Bible calls it different things—“household of God,” “body of Christ,” and other terms. Before the world began, God planned what is to be done by the church (Eph. 3:9-10). It would be a bad mistake if in an effort to determine what to call it, we end up deleting the practices

God appointed as its function. The entity we call the church is decreed in scripture. We must get its specifications from the Bible, not from conjecture.

THE HUMAN SIDE AND THE DIVINE SIDE

An up-front feature of the church in the Bible is that it has a divine element and a human element. God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are perfect, but the church's human members are very imperfect. This is misunderstood by the "no church" people. Human members, not the divine part of the church, work apostasies and distortions. Failure to realize this causes serious miscalculations.

God has always known about man's imperfections. When He made a covenant with Israel, He told Moses to write it down. Throughout Israel's history prior to Christ, the writings of Moses and the prophets had to be consulted often as reminders. Even with that provision they went off course and incurred God's judgment. *"Each transgression and disobedience received a just reward"* (Heb.2:2).

Even so, when Jesus planned the apostolic mission to establish the church in the world, He also planned written directives for His people. He said the Holy Spirit would give the apostles guidance so that they could produce, in speech and in writing, the specifications appointed of God for His New Covenant people. God is perfect and His plan is perfect, but the human part of the church is very imperfect.

The theory we are opposing here is the notion that when men distort God's way, the solution is to throw out the whole thing and put something in its place that is as much a product of human

conjecture as the one being thrown out. Would it make sense to think that if a person has a mental problem the solution is to amputate the head? Many do not realize the magnitude of such an idea. I do not say that Jesus built a church with perfect human members, not even one. I do say that He built a church and that it has a perfect divine side. I say that salvation for mankind is not available outside of it.

DO YOU REALIZE WHAT YOU ARE OPPOSING?

The head of the church is Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God. It has a perfect guide, the Holy Spirit, who inspired the word, which is His compass. Neither God nor Christ nor the Holy Spirit will ever apostatize or be unfaithful to what God has appointed. But humans often do. When considering what to do in that case, we need to be careful that we cast away human distortions, not the appointments of God.

How God views the church is portrayed graphically in Hebrews 12. The writer says we have not come to a mountain, or to blackness, or a tempest, *"But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first born, to God the judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel"* (vs. 18-24). Man's penchant for getting it wrong does not invalidate the real thing, nor make it non-existent. As Gamaliel would say, *"Stop and think about what you are aiming to do to a creation of God!"*

The fact that man can abuse God's design does not indicate that human wisdom is better, that man could create something that

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would be less subject to misuse. But it does give us a challenge. When we observe an organization of people called the church, and we see imperfections demonstrated in practice, we ought to remember that God, Christ, or the Holy Spirit do not do them. Human members do them. But the fact is they are there and we must recognize them. But these folks are mistaken about how that matter should be handled. What we should do is check with the Bible on each point of teaching and decide, as per the Bible. As we said before, don't do this amputation thing to a creation of God.

The prophets told Israel to consult the inspired writings of Moses and the prophets and regain a hold on divine instructions (Jer. 6:16). Even so, we can go to the inspired writings of the apostles and prophets of the Christian age and regain a hold on our divine instructions. The apostle Paul, in 2 Timothy 3:16, said that all scripture (Old Testament & New) is given by inspiration of God and is useful for "doctrine, correction, and instruction." Like Israel, we also have God's directives with which to compare, if we are willing to do so.

I participated in the *Examiner* meetings of the late 1980s and early 1990s. There was legitimate concern about distortions being practiced in God's name, and corrections that needed to be made by the scriptures. Charles Holt was a dear friend of ours, and his widow, Jewel, still is. Dusty Owens and I had similar backgrounds as entertainers in the country music field before we became ministers. He and Betty have been good friends of ours for many years. Others who were in those meetings have also continued to be our friends through the years. So we know about the issues raised there. The whole matter is being distorted out of shape now.

We called these meetings "Truth and Freedom" forums. They were an effort to clarify errors and to call for reformation. The

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“freedom” part was emphasized. Each person made studious decisions for himself. Dusty withdrew from the organized church but did not say that everyone had to withdraw. Charles worshipped frequently at a church in Chattanooga. Both knew that I did not view the word “church” exactly as they did, and this was acceptable. Our focus was on bringing out truth, not on throwing out all of the activities that were features of Christianity.

But now, a couple of decades later, what has come on the scene from kindred premises are opinionated extremisms. They seek to make legislations out of theories. What used to be “points for study” are now classified as settled matters of divine decree. Those who do not accept them are said to be unnaturally “addicted” to “Churchianity.”

The way the early Christians came into Christ was open to all. Paul said it was important to learn how to conduct ourselves in the *“house of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth”* (1 Tim. 3:15). Jesus commanded, *“Make disciples of them and then teach them to observe all things I have said to you.”*

It seems a remarkable thing to me that when some folks read the biblical narrative about how the church came into existence and how people became members of it that, after they do the same thing—obey the same Gospel message, believe they have been added to the Lord’s church, begin practicing the same instructions about conduct in the church, including regular assembling—these folks who claim to be followers of Jesus will rise up and declare others “apostate” and say they are afflicted with “mad church disease.” I do not know of a more serious mistake.

Let’s compare the tenets of the “no church” theory with Bible statements—point by point. I think the differences will be obvious.

Human theory: "Jesus did not build a church of Christ."

Scripture: "*Shepherd the church of the Lord and of God, which He purchased with His own blood*" (Acts 20:28).

Human theory: "The whole church need not assemble together. The right way is to gather in small groups in homes."

Scripture: "*Not forsaking the assembling of yourselves together*" (Heb.10:25). "*Therefore, when you come together in one place it is not to eat the Lord's supper*" (1 Cor.11:20).

Human theory: "We must not have a minister located with a congregation, for all members are ministers."

Scripture: "*And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them*" (Acts 18:11).

Human theory: "An evangelist travels and preaches the Gospel and that only to aliens, not to brethren."

Scripture: "Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill your ministry" (2 Tim. 4:5). Paul wanted to preach the Gospel to saints. "...all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7 & 15).

Human theory: "We need to be 'Christians at large,' not members of any institution, to fly only the flag of Jesus, not the church."

Scripture: "You are the body of Christ and members individually" (1 Cor. 12:27). "You are not strangers and foreigners but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19).

The biblical picture of the way of Christ is a very different thing to the "no church" theory. "*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding*" (Prov.3:5).

BUFF'S SECOND ESSAY

Let's begin this session by posing a question: If sects, religious parties, churches, denominations, and cults were set in motion by man, as opposed to their being authored by Messiah Jesus, what is the most sensible route out of our digressive plight? Since Jesus is not the architect of our religious parties, we should give solemn thought to leaving them behind and returning to what He authored—a *united body of believers*. The scriptures below will at least give us an idea how we can start reforming our current departure. You will note that I have substituted “congregation” in place of “church”—the correct rendering.

“Greet also the congregation in their house” (Rom. 16:5). *“Aquila and Prisca, together with the congregation in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord”* (1 Cor. 16:19). *“Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the congregation in her house”* (Col. 4:15). *“To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the congregation in your house”* (Phil. 1-2).

Yes, I am fully aware that religious parties can raise their ugly heads in house meetings as well as in church edifices (idols). Religious leagues had developed within the Christian community at Corinth (1 Cor. 1:10-12). Paul took them to task and reminded them that Christ is not divided.

We have a similar pattern today in the rendition of Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, Church of Christ devotees, Church of God disciples, Christian Church followers, Catholic Church members, and a host of other partisan creations. It seems that religious parties are more likely to develop and become solidified when elaborate church edifices are built than when believers meet in homes or common structures, as the early believers did. Instead of the early

believers spending large sums of money to construct large, imposing edifices to delight the eye, they contributed financially to evangelism (seeking the lost) and to alleviate the needs of the destitute.

CHURCH EDIFICES: A SIGN OF APOSTASY

Sects have one common mark of distinction: *Church Edifices*. Each religious persuasion constructs its own “holy icon” with which to be identified. I see far more negatives than positives involved in owning property. I could give a whole “grocery store list” of reasons why believers should steer away from buying and maintaining real estate to “play church” and “conduct worship services,” but two basic reasons are the costs to build and maintain a “house of worship” and the financial obligations of keeping an elitist (pulpit ecclesiastic) vocationally afloat.

Too, once a “house of worship” has been constructed, the believers who created it cease being the *ekklesia*—“called out ones”—and become a church—“called *in* ones.” As W. Carl Ketcherside once said, in regards to our fancy edifices, “Jesus said to get out and go, but we have come in to stay.” The same brother referred to the first church structure, built in about A. D. 200, as the “deathbed of Christianity.”

Believers have become addicted to their comfort zones and neither hell nor high water will dislodge them. After all, the pews are comfortable, the indoor plumbing convenient, the milieu appealing, and the pulpiteer’s handling of “worship services” is right on time and on target. How did we ever get this way? The blame should be placed upon the shoulders of the “chief priests and elders”—the clergy and their benefactors.

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Our idols—church structures—have isolated us from the world's needs, immobilized us, glued us to cushioned pews, and induced us to import outside “specialists” (clerical pulpiteers) to do our ministries. Is it any wonder the world looks upon us in disgust and laughs at our efforts to “save” them?

THE GOLDEN CALF & CHURCH IDOLS

Do you recall when Moses' descent from the Mountain of God was delayed? The idolatrous children of Israel built an idol in the form of a golden calf and bowed down to it (Exodus 32:1-8). In posting their evil behavior on public display, they corrupted themselves. If their idol worship conveys any validity for our current age, the Christian community may also be charged with idolatry, for she has built for herself “golden calves” in the likes of church edifices while Jesus' return from glory is being delayed.

I do not hesitate to affirm that our church structures and edifices are monuments that testify of our idolatry. The controversy is not whether it is right or wrong to meet somewhere. We each agree that a *place* or *location* is necessary. The issue is whether or not we have built church structures and edifices and set them apart—*sanctified them*—as holy expedients. I say we have. The evidence surrounds us. If I might be so bold, the modern church is as guilty of idolatry as were the children of Israel who erected Asherah poles as symbols of worship.

“Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved [consecrated] stone in your land to bow down before it” (Lev. 26:1).

Ours was once a noble movement. That movement apostatized

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and “fell from grace” centuries ago when Jesus’ command to “get out and go” was replaced by “come in and stay.”

My whole point has been that our priorities are misplaced. We spend millions of dollars on our idols—venerated structures and edifices—and very little on evangelism and feeding the world’s hungry. I will say it again: We are as guilty of idolatry as were the children of Israel and the pagans of their day.

We esteem our church structures as the “works of our mighty hands”—as though God Himself built them. We refuse to be ousted from our comfort zones. The cushions are too comfortable, and we delight in being hand-fed by hirelings who induce sleep by their stagnated “sermons.” We are stalemated with no hope of recovery unless we reform the whole system or start over.

PAUL AT ATHENS: A LESSON FOR US

If the great Apostle Paul were to re-visit the earth in the flesh today, I’m persuaded he would look around at our countless idols—church structures and other articles of “holiness”—and become just as distressed as he did when he saw the idols in Athens.

“While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols” (Acts 17:16).

If you will substitute “church edifices” and “holy articles” in the place of “idols,” you will get the true picture of our sordid predicament today. “Oh,” but you say, “We don’t worship church edifices and other objects!” Then consider that most church edifices and “religious” articles are viewed as hallowed objects. They are not to be defiled, contaminated, dishonored, or spoken

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evil of. To me, that's a form of spiritual veneration. To bolster my claim, let's give this passage in Acts 17 a modern-day paraphrase.

"While Paul was waiting for them in America, he was greatly distressed to see that the country was full of church edifices and other articles of worship."

The whole thing in a nutshell is that we, like old Israel, have constructed idols and designed comfort zones while the world's need of salvation goes unattended. What, then, should we do with our church idols? Tear them down? Convert them into shelters for the genuinely destitute—the "down-and-out" of our society? Use them for humanitarian purposes, as opposed to "worship services?" Turn them into office buildings? Sell them and take the proceeds to reach the lost and to feed the hungry? But whatever decision is made, we must get rid of our idols!

"Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves" (Lev. 19:4). "Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land and bow down to it" (Lev. 26:1).

We will give these passages a modern-day twist by substituting a few words to help us see the likeness:

"Do not turn to idols by using metal and other earthen material to build church edifices for yourselves. Do not make idols in the form of church edifices and Cathedrals or select sacred worship locations, for I am a jealous God."

I think the connection is quite visible. I entertain no doubt but that if the Apostle Paul were among us in the flesh, he would tell

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us in no uncertain terms that “the Lord who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by [human] hands” (Acts 17:24).

Temples? Does that include church edifices? Yes, of course. Under the Covenant of Moses, God made His abode in earthen structures. But no longer! He now dwells in the believer’s heart. *We* are God’s temple and His Spirit lives in us (1 Cor. 3:16-17). This translates into the truth that worship in the grace era is anytime and the place where we are. Jesus confirms this fact in John 4:21-24. To build a church edifice for “worship services” and call it the “house if God” is to make an attempt, consciously or unconsciously, to restore the Old Covenant of Moses—Judaism.

SYMPTONS OF “MAD CHURCH DISEASE”

Up to this junction in this *Second Essay*, I have tried to reveal an additional symptom of the apostate church. Every disease, whether physical or spiritual, is recognized by symptoms. There are numerous earmarks that identify the apostate church as being afflicted with “mad church disease.” As we proceed, I hope to connect to others.

OBSERVATIONS ON OLAN’S FIRST ESSAY

I do not want to bring this second installment to a close without advancing a few observations relative to some of the matters my fellow editor and scribe addressed.

1) Let it be echoed that I’m a strong promoter of both the old and new covenant scriptures, believing them to have come our way through God’s providence. They are our guide, not our Savior. All

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the same, I do not believe those scriptures are our source of unity, but rather the *Man* those scriptures describe. Unity abounded among the early believers, even though not one word of the new covenant scriptures was written until decades later. If a volume of scripture could save and confer unity, the old covenant scriptures would have been sufficient. Our unity and salvation are not contingent upon our conforming to a volume of letters, as important as they are, but upon the *Man* who inspired his servants to produce them.

If I were to tell you in a letter I have a few expensive gifts to give you, free of charge, would you conclude the letter *itself* would bestow those gifts or the person *behind* the letter? My letter may instruct you what to do to receive the gifts, but it would not be the provider. And so it is with our biblical letters.

2) Just because one's conception of some biblical topic does not rhyme with someone else's, does not translate into a disregard for scripture. After all, my fellow scribe, who claims to have a high regard for scripture, is occasionally off-center. None of us are biblically infallible. We all are fallible, but in different ways and in different doctrinal areas.

3) As to Acts 19 and *ekklesia*, it can be easily shown that King James and his translators were inconsistent and manipulative. In verses 32, 39, and 41, *ekklesia* correctly delivers "assembly." My concern is *why* did his translators fail to translate *ekklesia* "church" in these passages, as they did elsewhere? If they had been consistent, we would have, "For the church was confused," "It shall be determined in a lawful church," and "He dismissed the church."

The reason for this discrepancy is evident. The king *forced*

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“church” into his translation to bolster his sect, *The Established Church of England*. The point I wish to make is if *ekklesia* is delivered correctly here, it is delivered incorrectly wherever “church” is found. There is no escaping this fact. The king went wild in using “church.” In verse 37, he even used it in place of “temple!”

One of the foundational features of *The Established Church of England* sect was that she was colonized around “church,” just as our religious parties are. Hence, to keep “church” out of his version of the scriptures would have made him appear as though he were King and Head of a *mere* congregation or assembly. That would have been degrading!

“Church” became so common following *The King James Version* that most all other translations followed suit. There are a few exceptions, however. *The Authentic New Testament* (1955), translated by Hugh J. Schonfield, a Jew, gives “congregation” as the translation of *ekklesia*. Alexander Campbell’s *Living Oracles* (1800s) does not carry “church.” He used “church” in some of his writings, but he left it out of his *Living Oracles*. He knew the Greek *ekklesia* did not justify it. Another translation destitute of “church” is *The Christian Bible* (1991).

The deliberate mistake made by King James has cost us dearly, for contemporary religions have pounced upon his offense by creating and establishing sects and factions under the guise of “church” until they have divided and sub-divided themselves out of practical existence. Consequently, we have an apostate system.

4) In spite of all the fleeting remarks about “church,” the fact remains that she is a fabrication of King James, not King Jesus.

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The Apostle Paul said that Jesus “gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). It cannot be denied, if one believes the Bible, that Jesus purified to Himself a special people, intending that they have a desire to do good things in His name in the world. The thought of casting away the functioning part of this divine intention is scarier to me than the possibility that someone might use a wrong word to designate it.

Three questions: 1) What is the process of the purifying for which Christ gave Himself? 2) Who are the “special people” produced thereby? 3) What are the works for which they are to be zealous?

The purifying procedure is clearly stated. “*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word*” (Eph. 5:25). In Acts 2, the Lord added the obedient ones, who were washed in water, to their number (vs. 38, 41, & 47). The special people thus produced are “those who were being saved.” As Paul wrote, “*It pleased God, by the foolishness of the message preached, to save those who believe*” (1 Cor. 1:21).

According to the scriptures, when the message is preached and folks receive it and obey its commands, they are cleansed by the blood of Christ and set apart as belonging to the number of “special people” who are “zealous for good works.” These works consist of many things, set forth in the scriptures, especially in the apostolic epistles to the churches.

Several years ago my mother, a widow, was in the final days of her earthly life. A group of people called a “church,” near where

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she lived in Michigan with my older sister, were a blessing to her. The minister and others visited mother “in her affliction,” one of the assignments given in scripture, and did many things to comfort her. They brought the communion on Sunday and often a group of teenagers came and sang to her. This was comforting and meaningful to her and to all of us. Do you think God wants such a group as this to exist and to do such things as they did?

Perhaps you will say, “Yes, provided they do not meet in a building and call it a church.” In Acts, chapter 6, the apostles told the brethren of the Jerusalem church to attend to the matter of caring for the widows by appointing someone to oversee the work. Later, James wrote, “*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit orphans and widows in their trouble and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*”

I can understand how a sincere person might look at the many churches where this and other things that should be are not happening, and conclude that those churches are not what Jesus built. But to conclude that the Lord did not build the church at all is faulty reasoning and a dangerous idea.

The *standard of authority* is the heart of the problem here. To be led away from a concept so clearly spelled out in the written guide, a person would have to set aside or corrupt that guide. This is how the “no church” folks got to where they are. The reader may notice that in my Essays, I put forth concepts that are pictured in the words of the Bible and my friend and co-author puts forth concepts consisting of human theory, such as the calculation that more money must be spent on evangelism than on a facility in which to assemble, and the idea that it is wrong to support a local minister to teach.

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE SCRIPTURES A VITAL FACTOR

Our differences are rooted in the fact that we have different standards of measurement. My friend says he respects the scriptures but that they are not the standard—rather, the Jesus who is pictured in those scriptures. He says they were not written until several decades after the *ekklesia* began—implying what?

First, did not the apostles deliver the saving Gospel on Pentecost day? Surely. When they later wrote it down, did they write something different? When we say the message was not in written form until later, do we mean to say it did not exist until later? Did the Holy Spirit inspire their writings? Peter was clear on this point, “*The word of the Lord endures forever, and this is the word which by the Gospel was preached to you*” (1 Peter 1:25).

Paul said that if anyone, even an angel from heaven, preaches any other Gospel than what we have preached to you, “*Let him be accursed*” (Gal. 1:8). It is an extremely serious mistake to conclude that the written New Testament is not the same Gospel as was preached, and which saved men, from Pentecost day forward. Paul told the church at Corinth, “*If any man thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are the commandments of the Lord*” (1 Cor. 14:37).

My friend illustrates his attitude toward the scriptures by saying that if he sent you a letter and told you where to find a free gift he had put in your house, the letter would not be the giver of the gift. This misses the point at issue. The question posed by our issue is this: If the instructions were given verbally instead of by letter, would they still be the same and would they still be necessary to locate the gift?

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The word of God is forever settled in heaven and is not subject to change (Psalms 119:89). Jesus brought it to earth and said it was not His own but the Father's who sent Him. He also said that we all would be judged by it. God did not send forth more than one Gospel.

We cannot separate "Jesus the man" from His word. Jesus said, "*He who has my commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves me and I will love him and will manifest myself to him*" (John 14:21). John wrote that one who does not have the doctrine (or teaching) of Christ does not have God and whoever has the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son (2 John 9).

But my friend says "Jesus the man" is the only banner to fly. Well, Jesus the man worshipped at the Temple, a very elaborate edifice built by human hands, as God instructed, and He called it "the house of God." I guess my friend would see this as idolatry. Jesus also worshipped in synagogues, which were built by human hands without instructions from God. He met with His disciples in private homes and even out in open country, such as in the garden. He told the Samaritan woman that the "where" of meeting was not legislated but rather the "what" of it (John 4:21-23). My friend admits this and says the issue is not the *where* but in *what* facility. Is it? Has God ruled on that point? No. Men rule on it on the basis of a theory, the belief that more should be spent on benevolence than on the meetinghouse and that some may worship the building.

Not only is the geographical spot not legislated, but the physical surroundings are not legislated, either. The early Christians met at the Temple on the ground floor. They also met often in an upper room. In Acts 20 they were in an assembly on the third floor of some sort of building. When one presumes to legislate on this matter, it is another indication that human theory is being relied

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upon without any Biblical confirmation. I do not agree with the judgment that people are “addicted to church buildings,” any more than I would agree that my friend is addicted to living rooms. It is a choice based on the simple matter of expediency, a choice that obviously God has left for us to make.

How could anyone read about Paul’s visit to Athens in Acts 17 and think that his condemnation of idols had any connection with church buildings? That is quite a stretch, especially when you consider that he said expressly, “*As I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.’*” It was their statues he referred to, not their places of meeting. Yes, idolatry is committed when a material thing is an object of devotion and in competition with God. But before you put church meeting places in that category, you might think about what God said to His people in the Old Testament when the place of meeting was specified. The book of Haggai is a rebuke to the people because they beautified their own houses and did not beautify the Temple. Beautifying the Temple was not idolatry. It was obedience to a command of God.

IF THE BIBLE IS NOT THE STANDARD, WHAT IS?

If we put aside the scriptures, what do we have left? We have human theory. This is what led to perverted churches, which causes us to perceive a need to reform. The need is not for more of the same. Reformation is not accomplished by replacing one human theory with another. Having a church is not the problem. Having a perverted church is the problem. Therefore, we need to look closely at the original entity and try to restore the God-given features of it.

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Actually, if I understand correctly, the “no church” people admit that Jesus has a called-out body of people. But they say it has apostatized beyond recognition by becoming a “church.” They have some ideas about how to reform it that seem very strange. They say if we do not call it a church, do not meet in a religious edifice, or building, do not support a preacher to teach locally, and have as our guide Jesus the man, we will have God’s way restored.

My friend likes to say that in the “church,” the command “Get out and go” is changed to “Come in and stay.” But the Lord’s command is not “Get out and go.” It is, “Come into Christ and then reach out and draw others in so that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23). The “no church” theology really changes this. They see the command as, “Disperse and disappear, but first destroy the house”

There are indications that some of you have experienced wrongful mistreatment by certain church leaders and have witnessed some ugly attitudes by some who claim to represent God. But be careful how you let this affect your judgment. Folks who have allowed their disgust with abuses to generate into hatred and animosity will not be able to do the kind of reforming we are speaking about. You will need an open mind to be able to be objective with Bible statements.

The Pharisees meant well, too. They wanted to purge out evil from God’s people, down to the minutest detail. But their own theories had so clouded their vision that Jesus referred to them as “blind leaders of the blind” (Matt. 15:14). He said that when this happens, “both will fall into the ditch.” I urge you, make sure from the written word that the commands you issue are from God and that they harmonize with His revealed will. The commands about church buildings, a minister, and other things need to be reviewed.

WE MUST ALL BE CAREFUL OF PSEUDO SCHOLARSHIP

When a person tries to substantiate a certain concept by the original language of the New Testament, he often gets in over his head—beyond his linguistic qualifications. Translating is a specialized work that requires expertise beyond the ability to look up definitions of words in a lexicon. We must not forget our limitations in that field.

Most experts agree that the final determiner of word meanings is not lexical definitions but how they are used in the Bible text. In first century Israel, the Greek word “ekklesia” was used in reference to the citizenry of a given locale who, as free born, were authorized to gather and voice their opinions on town matters, all on equal footing. In the New Testament, Jesus applied this word to His people, whether dispersed or assembled. In Acts 19, the Bible still applies it to a gathered mob, an unlawful *ekklesia*, a non-religious gathering. These uses are applications of the word, not technical definitions. Evidently, some do not understand the difference.

To illustrate, the definition of ‘water’ is H₂O. It is applied to a river, an ocean, or a lake. These words—river, lake, ocean—are not the definition of “water,” yet the word is rightly applied to them. “Ekklesia” is from “ek,” meaning out, and “kaleo,” meaning to call. Its definition is “called out.” The word “church” is not its definition. “Assembly” is not its definition; nor is “congregation.” These are *applications* of the word, not definitions. When one says “church does not translate it because its definition is ‘the called out,’ ” but at the same time says “congregation translates it” and forgets that its definition is “the called out,” he is making an

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inconsistent application and calling it a translation. The Bible itself applies the word variously, with different applications, not different definitions.

I suggest that removing the church is a gigantic mistake. Stop and think about what you are rejecting. When Saul was trying to destroy the church, Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and said, "*Why are you persecuting me?*" What you do to the church you do to Jesus, for it is His body. Try to purge out error? Yes. Try to keep it pure? Yes. But rejecting it altogether is another matter.

Setting aside the inspired word as the standard is also a very serious step. It is to set aside Jesus, for He sent the Holy Spirit to dictate it. For centuries men have tried to separate Jesus the man from His word. There is no inconsistency between them. Jesus Himself tells us that to reject His word is to reject Him (John 12:48). Peter said we are born again by the word and saved by Jesus and His sacrifice. The inspired word is a living word, a holy thing.

Rejecting the practices that are assigned in scripture to be the functions of the church, is rejecting what God planned before the world began. One of these is its mission as the pillar and ground of the truth. "*To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places*" (Eph. 3:10). The plan of God to save people of the world is embodied in His church. The process is "by the foolishness of the message preached," which is a primary assignment of the church. The salvation of mankind depends on it.

In my next essay, I plan to treat specifically the church functions that are set aside by the "no church" theology. Many of you are sincere, well-meaning folks, who have not set aside the scriptures as a standard. I believe you want to be part of the Lord's special people, zealous of good works. Further study might help.

BUFF'S THIRD ESSAY

A college president said in a letter to me that “church” is an acceptable translation of the Greek *ekklesia* if “church” means to us what *ekklesia* meant to the Greeks. That sounds pretty convincing, but the bottom line is that “church” is *not* a translation of the Greek *ekklesia*—any more than “sect” and “denomination” are admissible translations, even if they should mean to us what *ekklesia* meant to the Greeks.

PLAYING AROUND WITH “CHURCH”

We have played around with “church” far too long. We have taken a mistranslated word—King James’ term—and erected sectarian walls around it. Those walls have formed the Baptist Church, Methodist Church, Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church, Catholic Church, Church of God Church, Christian Church, Church of Christ Church (*a cappella*), Assembly of God Church, Evangelical Free Church, Pentecostal Church, and a host of others.

Here is where the fundamental and inexcusable sin has been committed. We have built our own brand of wall around “church” and excluded far too many sincere believers who do not “belly up” to our brand of religion. We call that wall “The Lord’s church” and dare anyone to breach it.

Yes, unquestionably, there is only one body of believers, as per Ephesians 4:4. But we have misused and misapplied that divine passage by applying it to the wall we have erected in the form of “church.” It is shameful and disgraceful. If Ephesians 4:4 can be desecrated by creating many bodies, it may also be violated by concocting many Gods, Spirits, hopes, Lords, and faiths. The obvious truth is that we have sinned by dividing that one body of believers into a profusion of sects and factions. We ought to get

down upon our knees and petition the Lord to forgive us.

ECCLESIASTICAL ABUSES

Our obsession with “church” and church idols (edifices) are not the only reasons we have an apostate establishment on our hands, nor are they the only culprits. For even “congregation,” “community,” and “assembly”—correct renderings of the Greek *ekkesia*—are not immune from ecclesiastical abuse. And if our English “church” had never surfaced, our people would have devised another foreign icon to use as their sacred cow.

When we adopt any label or title that separates us from our fellow Christians, as we have done with “church,” we become a divisive religious league—a party, sect. I like the way *The Living Bible* tenders Galatians 5:20. It identifies the party spirit as “the feeling that everyone else is wrong except those in your own little group.” I’m inclined to believe this strikes at the very core of our divisive predicament. The *New English Bible* renders “party intrigues,” and *The Christian Bible* describes the party spirit as “dissensions, sects.”

So we need to inquire: *Have we adopted the “church” epithet to separate ourselves from other believers and to identify ourselves as a particular breed of Christians?* To clarify, are we Baptist Christians, Methodist Christians, Church of Christ Christians, Lutheran Christians, Presbyterian Christians, Assembly of God Christians, or Church of God Christians?

If “yes” to any of the above, the Spirit justly charges us with possessing the party spirit (Galatians 5:20). No tossing of the coin will alleviate that fact. And if we are guilty of creating and/or pro-

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moting religious parties, how can we then claim that Jesus authored our churches? He founded the one body of believers, not our multicolored schisms. His children are scattered among most sects—for wherever He has a child, we have a brother or a sister. But He is not the framer of our denominations, just as He was not the framer of the sects of his day.

There are, of course, other earmarks of a sect or religious party besides its name, label, or title. When a group of professed believers sets up a doctrinal platform, whether based on truth or fallacy, and rejects other believers who cannot accept it, that group becomes a religious party or sect. The “Christ party” at Corinth was as wrong as the “Paul party,” the “Apollos party,” and the “Cephas party” (I Cor. 1:12-13). It was wrong because it rejected other believers.

THE CLERGY & THE APOSTATE CHURCH

Of all the tokens that point to an apostate church, the kingly clergy is at the top of the list. Their function did not surface until centuries after Jesus and His special envoys, the apostles, introduced the new order. This cancer within the body of believers developed during the period when Roman Catholicism was blooming to stardom. The Protestant movement, following Martin Luther’s break-off from the “Holy See,” appropriated and utilized it.

Men of this class are considered to be of special rank. They expect to be listened to while behind the pulpit and saluted in the vestibule. They perform the major part of teaching, preaching, exhorting, admonishing, edifying, comforting, praying, visiting, showing compassion, and exhibiting concern. They organize meet-

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ings, programs, projects, conferences, and are usually on duty when problems arise or the “enemy” approaches.

It would be religiously unethical to view these men as the “usual run of the mill,” for they rank above commoners and pew-sitters. They are “men of nobility” who expect to be referred to as either *the Preacher, the Priest, the Minister, the Pastor, the “Reverend,” the “Defender of the Faith,” the “Doctor”*—or all of them fused together. Their “hallowed” functions are foreign to the primitive order and counter to heaven’s wishes. Some of them dress like Mother but want to be called “Father!”

We clearly go astray when we elevate one believer above other believers. The Apostle James makes it plain that when we show favoritism, make distinctions between one another, we discriminate among ourselves (James 2:1-9).

WHY IS THE CLERGY SYSTEM UNSOUND?

Heaven’s testimony says we are to *mutually* edify one another. “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Rom. 14:19). We are told to “instruct one another” and to “teach and admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14 & Col. 3:16). Additionally, we are admonished to “encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thess. 5:11).

The “one another” method is heaven’s model. The “solo method” is man’s model. In all of these passages, there is no hint of the *solo* edifier or *solo* minister. Paul, in the Corinthian letter, clearly paints a picture of assembled believers *mutually* instructing one another (1 Cor. 14). The *solo* edifier or *solo* minister isn’t even alluded to. His function was conspicuous because of its absence!

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The controversy is not whether a congregation can have *a* minister. This argument hedges and overlooks the core issue. All believers within a gathering are ministers, for all are servants. The valid question is whether a congregation of ministers can import an elite orator to be *the* minister. His function interferes with the “one another” model, as outlined earlier.

When Paul sent for the leaders of the Christian community at Ephesus (Acts 17:20), for whom did he ask? *The* minister? No. *A* minister? No. He sent for the elders or shepherds. Why did he fail to include *the* minister? Wasn't his role significant enough to justify Paul's including him? *He wasn't there*. Roman Catholicism devised his post many decades later. Protestantism borrowed this “religious celebrity” from the Roman Catholic sect.

DUBIOUS CLAIMS & CLARIFICATIONS

My fellow scribe attributes the following two statements to me:

“The scriptures have not brought unity to all believers. Therefore, they are not reliable as a standard” (p. 15).

“Men have distorted the church and perverted it. Therefore, the whole concept of ‘church’ is a bad idea and should be discarded” (p. 16).

The scriptures are not the spring of Christian unity, but rather the Man those scriptures describe. The early believers had unity before one word of the new covenant scriptures was written.

My stance is that Churchianity is sectarianism. It descended from King James, not Jesus. The whole partisan *system*—note, I said *system*—should either be reformed or thrown by the wayside.

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Typical reasoning of the "no church" reformers is that since King James ordered that certain words be retained in his 1611 Version, those words must be wrong (p. 16).—Olan.

Perhaps my fellow penman should take a look at King James' "Easter" (Acts 12:4). The Greek delivers "Passover." King James delivered "Easter." If the co-author of this endeavor rejects "Easter" as a correct rendering, why is it so difficult for him to reject King James' "church"? Partisan religion has been built around "Easter," just as partisan religion revolves around "church."

The idea of having a minister was distorted into the modern "clergy" system. Therefore, it is wrong to have a minister" (p. 16).—Olan.

This is another exaggeration of my position. The issue is not a minister, for all are ministers, but *the* minister. What we need here is the biblical testimony that details our modern-day Pulpit Minister, Senior Minister, Associate Minister, Executive Minister, Senior Pastor, and "Reverend" Jones. We may search till the "cows come home," but it will not be found. Even the *concept* escapes us.

It is argued that it [church] does not properly translate "ekklesia." Is that correct? Is there a better English word to use? Some suggest "congregation," but that does not allow for the universal body (p. 16).—Olan.

It did under Moses, for Moses led the *congregation* of Israel. The congregation of Israel composed the universal body of Israel.

Jesus called them out and called them together. Whatever expresses that idea is right to translate "ekklesia" (p. 16).—Olan.

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Let us take the same concept to see if it will apply equally to Acts 12:4. As the knowledgeable student knows, King James substituted “Easter” for “Passover.” If “Easter” expresses what is found in the Greek *pascha*, it is acceptable to translate it “Easter.” Will my fellow penman accept this logic?

Here is where the bone rubs: “Easter” does not express what is found in the Greek *pascha* (Passover), and “church” does not express what is found in the Greek *ekklesia* (congregation, assembly, or community).

“Easter” stemmed from *Eastre*, a pagan goddess, and denotes a pagan festival, while the Greek *pascha* refers to the Jewish Passover. The devious Vatican borrowed “Easter” from the pagans, dressed it up with a few eccentric solemnities, and began to celebrate it as a holy day. Protestants then acquired the “holy day” from the papacy.

The same is true with “church” or Churchianity. Like “Easter,” she does not have her genesis in heaven, but was acquired from men. Consequently, “church” denotes a sect, a religious party, a schism, but *never* the one body of believers. As Jesus is not the author of religious parties, neither is He the author of churches.

Our focus was on bringing out truth, not on throwing out the whole of Christianity (p. 20).—Olan.

By “throwing out the whole,” my brother means throwing out his church! Truth cannot be thrown out. It is eternal. Sectarianism or Churchianity can and should be discarded, for it is of man.

Human theory: “An evangelist travels and preaches the Gospel

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only to aliens, not to brethren.” Paul wanted to preach the Gospel to saints (p. 21).—Olan.

Traveling has little to do with evangelism. A believer may live his entire life in one place while functioning as an evangelist. Evangelism pertains to heralding or preaching or broadcasting the Good News about Jesus to the unregenerate. *Thayer* defines “evangelist” as the name given to the heralds of salvation. Like all of heaven’s conferred gifts, evangelism is a ministry. Timothy’s ministry was evangelism, a harbinger of Good News (2 Tim. 4:5).

As believers have already been evangelized, they cannot be preached to. Accordingly, Paul did not indicate in Romans 1:15 that he wanted to evangelize the Christians at Rome, for they had already been preached to or evangelized. He no doubt referred to the general population of Rome. Believers are taught, instructed, tutored, edified, and strengthened, but they cannot be evangelized or preached to.

Churchianity’s pulpit clerics who “preach” to the redeemed are attempting the impossible. If they truly desire to preach, they should take the redemptive message to the unsaved. Believers may be *reminded* of the Good News, and the Good News may need to be *defended*, but it cannot be *preached* to those who have already accepted it. It is no longer *news* to the saved.

Human theory: “We must not have a minister located with a congregation, for all members must be ministers” (p. 21).—Olan.

True, all believers are ministers. No one should be imported to serve as *the* minister, as though he’s the only one. Paul remained at Corinth for 18 months, teaching, but not as *the* minister (Acts 18:11).

OLAN'S THIRD ESSAY

One who would presume to re-translate the scriptures has an obligation to get the linguistic facts straight. I suggest that the reader return to page 37 where, in my second essay, I cited some facts about the Greek word “ekklesia” and explained its usage. It is defined as “called out,” but it can be applied to “congregation”—a word not defined as “called out.” It can also be applied to “church” or to “assembly,” neither of which is defined as “called out.” To illustrate my point, “water” is defined as H₂O. But it can be applied to a lake or a river, neither of which is defined as H₂O. What my friend is missing is the difference between a technical definition and a meaningful application. It is nonsense to reject the word “church” as an application because it is not defined as “called out,” and at the same time accept the word “congregation,” which, too, is not defined as “called out.” These two words stand or fall together.

I think we also need to learn something about what “reformation” is, as pictured in the Bible. In the time of king Josiah, the book of God’s law had been lost and the Israelites were off course—not following God’s directions. But the book was found in the Temple and the king directed a return to God’s way, according to that writing. He read the words of the book of the covenant in the hearing of all the people. Standing by a pillar, he stated a commitment “to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant” (2 Kings 23:3).

This was reformation, as described in scripture, an effort to correct the things that had gone wrong and recover the original way of God as it had been written. Suppose instead that Josiah had said, “O, it is only a book and not a standard of authority. My own reasoning will be a better guide to reforming.” He might have con-

cluded that since the Mosaic covenant had been perverted so badly, the way to fix it was to throw out the whole idea of a messianic people belonging to God. He might have reasoned that having such an elaborate and beautiful Temple would amount to idolatry, that there should not be a high priest but that all should be priests, and that assemblies of the people should be in small groups in private homes, not in one large assembly in the house of God. Incredible? This is just about what produced the “no church” theology. The difference is that to Josiah, God’s written word was the final word.

In this reformation no other writings were consulted, just the book of God. No man-made rulings were applied, only God's directives. This procedure is also given in the New Testament as the way to make corrections. *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God might be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (2 Tim. 3:16).

KEEP WHAT GOD INCLUDED, OMIT ALL HE OMITTED

In Revelation 20:12, we read about the judgment to come and we find it will be according to what is written in some books. *“And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”* These books are the books of the Bible. If not, what books are they? Will we be judged by books we do not have and have never seen?

Imagine getting to the Judgment and seeing several different judgment benches. One group of folks is standing before a bench on which the books are the publications of “The Watchtower.” Another group of people are standing before another bench on which the books are the Catechisms of Catholicism. Yet another

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group stands before a bench on which the books are Protestantism's "Confessions of Faith." On yet another bench of particular interest to us are the bound volumes or books of my co-author's "Reformation Rumbblings."

If we have the choice of preparing for Judgment by what is said in these writings or by the writings God has given us, what is the sensible choice? The author of those last books says, "O, but we are biblically accurate!" But the others also say that. And, like the others, that one sets forth another standard of authority and places the written scriptures in second place, seemingly attributing its ideas to a direct guidance from the Holy Spirit. I will say with Joshua, "*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.*"

For all who will choose this route, I offer the following clarifications from the written word concerning some issues that have been raised by the "no church" theology. On some points they add rulings God has not given and, on other points, they omit rulings He has given. One main culprit is faulty logic. This means we have a dual problem, the omission of biblical instruction, and the intrusion of human theory into the throne room. All I ask is an objective comparison of the tenets of this theory with the written word.

Check out the following questions in light of what the Bible says: Should the whole body of Christ come together for worship or is all of life continuous worship? Is it wrong to refer to this body of people as "the church"? Should an evangelist preach the Gospel to the saints, or only to aliens? Should there be a minister who does most of the teaching, or must all Christians be ministers? Is it the will of Christ that there be any kind of organizational relationship between His followers, or should we be "Christians at large"? If we want to reform, shouldn't we ask what God says on each point?

1) Assembling for worship: “So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people, and the disciples were called ‘Christians’ first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26). The word here translated “assembled” has as its first syllable “sun,” which usually means for religious purposes. It is the first syllable of “sunagoge” (synagogue), recognized as a place of worship. In Hebrews 10:25 the order is given, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,” and the “sun” syllable is there also. It would be appropriate to apply this to the “no church” people, for the writer went on to say, “as the custom of some is.”

Is all of life continuous worship? You really need to rethink this. Jesus gave two items of responsibility to God in this regard. “You shall worship (*proskuneo*) the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve” (*latreio*). The first word means to bow or prostrate oneself, and the second word means to do service that is offered to God. It is this second word that is used in Romans 12:1, “...which is your reasonable service.” As we live life, there are things we must do as service to God, and there is also the act of bowing before Him in worship. In the assembly we do both. As service to God, we do acts such as singing, teaching, and edifying each other. We bow before Him in prayer, as well as in a reverent attitude in all that we do.

It is not wrong, therefore, to say that we go to a specific place to worship, and it is not wrong to call it a “worship service” since both worship and service take place there. Some people would make coffee nervous with their tedious and tireless efforts to find fault.

2) Is it wrong to refer to the people of Christ as “the church”? As we mentioned, *Webster's* #1 definition of “church”

is, "The company of all Christians considered as a mystic spiritual body." This is exactly what the Bible says the Lord's people are. I do not know of another word in English that is so defined. "Congregation" is not. "Assembly" is not. The Greek "ekklesia" means "the called out." It is applied in scripture to the people of Christ. How can it be wrong to call it by a word that means, in our language, "the people of Christ"? King James did not invent this word. He only insisted that it be retained in his translation. That does not make it wrong.

3) Should an evangelist be one who preaches only the first principles of the Gospel, and that only to aliens, while a minister is seen as one who preaches doctrine to Christians? This is entirely a human theory. Nothing of this sort is stated anywhere in the Bible. Once again my fellow editor is obviously in over his linguistic head. The Greek word *euangellion*, from which comes "evangelist," simply means to proclaim. It does not specify to *whom* the proclaiming is done. It is sometimes translated "Gospel." No distinction is noted in scripture between what a minister proclaims and what an evangelist proclaims. Paul referred to Timothy as both a minister and an evangelist. "*Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry*" (2 Tim. 4:5). Paul referred to himself that way, too.

For example, in Romans 1:1, he said he was "set apart for the Gospel of God" (*euangellion*). Though he was appointed to be an evangelist, in verse 15 he told the Romans, "*I am ready to preach the Gospel to you who are in Rome also.*" The idea that he was speaking of all people who lived in Rome is absurd, for in verse 7 he specified precisely to whom he referred: "*To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.*" He wanted to preach to saints.

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When men insert their opinions to make rulings about divine things, the cause of Christ is not benefited, and is often harmed. This is because such opinions are generated in the human mind, which is inferior to the mind of God, and usually contrary to it.

4) Should a minister locate with a congregation and be its primary teacher? *“And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them”* (Acts 18:11). The same apostle who did this wrote that God’s people have different gifts (1 Cor. 12:4). In Romans 12:6, he said, *“Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, let us use them.”* He then listed some of them. The second one on the list is “ministering,” and the third one is “teaching.” In 1 Corinthians 12:29, he asks, *“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?”* To declare that we all have the same gifts and thus should all do the same things is to simply repudiate the inspired word of God on the matter.

If one has the gift of ministering and he uses it, should he be supported by the church? It was at Corinth where Paul worked at tent making, and also received some support while he was ministering there. Later, he wrote to them, *“I robbed other churches, taking wages of them to minister to you”* (2 Cor.11:8). In explaining what the Lord wants in this matter, Paul related ministers to the priests of the Old Testament in the sense that they lived off the things brought to the altar. Then he said, *“Even so the Lord has appointed that those who preach the Gospel shall live of the Gospel”* (1 Cor. 9:13). Evidently, this is another one of those things in which God has not given a hard and fast ruling, for Paul apparently did both. He worked at tent making and also received support from elsewhere. Thus the word of God leaves it to the judgment of expediency.

But as usual, the “no church” folks have filled in that blank for God. Looking at a distorted clergy system, they refer to the minister sarcastically as a “chief” and suggest that he is an imposition on the people. Paul wrote that he took “wages.” Clearly, he agreed with Jesus who said, *“The laborer is worthy of his hire”* (Luke 10:7).

5) Is it the will of God that there be any organizational relationship between His followers, or should we be “Christians at large”? *“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and have been all made to drink into one spirit”* (1 Cor. 12:13). That entire 12th chapter is focused on this very point. In that chapter alone, Paul uses the word “members” 12 times to indicate that we belong to the same body. To the Ephesians, he wrote, *“There is one body”* (4:4). He further told them to maintain the unity of the Spirit in that one body. That body is not divided by using the word “church.” They all use that word. Groups pulling away from the one Head divide it.

It is true that there are no officers to be appointed with authority over this body. In fact, Jesus expressly affirmed that very idea, *“It shall not be so among you”* (Matt. 20:26). So throw out the ecclesiastical hierarchy? Yes. Throw out the idea of an authoritarian clergy system? Yes. We do that with the authority of Jesus. But “authority” and “fellowship” are two different things. If in the course of throwing out the idea of “authorities,” you also throw out the “one body” relationship among Christians, you disobey Jesus. His very message is a calling together of His people. It is even more incredible that this man-made order to disperse and be “Christians at large” is done in the name of “restoring unity.” As we have said, there are many illogical equations in the “logic” of “no church” theology.

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Perhaps my friend, Buff, reaches a peak of “illogic” with this statement: “When a group of professed believers sets up a doctrinal platform, whether based on truth or fallacy, and rejects other believers who cannot accept it, that group becomes a religious party or sect” (p. 41). You may need to read that again. Yes, he said, “whether based on truth or fallacy.” This may explain some things.

But I am not ready to believe that my friend means to say that it is factious and wrong to contend for your belief, whether it is fallacy or truth, especially when I note that he is doing exactly that. Our purpose here is not to convict anyone of anything but rather to clarify the subject under discussion. So let's go slowly here. This might be a misstatement. I think I will wait for more clarification in a more precise statement about attitude toward biblical authority.

Meanwhile, I do not hesitate to state my own position with respect to the authority of scripture. I believe it pleased God to save those who believe “by the foolishness of the message preached.” I believe the Holy Spirit guided the apostles in delivering that message and that He inspired those who wrote the books of the New Testament in which the terms of the Covenant are spelled out. I do not believe this information, God's will for man, is given to us today in any other way. I believe the word of God is living and active and that it will not return void to the God who sent it forth. I believe we will all confront it again at the Judgment and will be judged by what is written there.

I realize that we have the problem of translations, and the Gospel was not written in the form of a statutory law book. But the form in which it is written does not make its laws any less binding and its teaching any less precise. God's word is the standard. Our greatest threat is false teachers.

BUFF'S FOURTH ESSAY

The principal thrust of this dialogue is to ascertain if Churchianity—or *any* church or unit within that division—is equivalent to God's new reign, or if the whole conglomeration falls under the wing of an apostate system. Each church on the market, including the church I deserted decades ago, and the same religious party my fellow scribe bosoms up to and promotes (*a cappella* Church of Christ), claims to be God's handiwork, His reign or kingdom, and His one body of believers.

At this point, and to further clarify, it has become necessary to categorize the apostate church into four groupings and tender a few traits of *why* each group is part of the overall apostate structure. The four groupings may be identified as follows:

- **Paganistic/Judaistic**—Sexual Scandals; History of bloodshed; Depravities; Bizarre.
- **Liberal**—Loose Spectrum of Doctrines.
- **Evangelical**—Earthen-centered; Unable to see above the clouds; Messages pregnant with sensationalism.
- **Unrelenting Dogmatists**—“Our way or no way.”

PAGANISTIC & JUDAISTIC PARTY

This group embodies Roman Catholicism. She is half pagan and half Judaist. As you are no doubt aware, homosexuality and pedophilia are rampant among the so-called “Faithful” of the Roman Catholic clerics. This isn't a new revelation, for history abounds with scandals of a sexual kind involving the professional clergy of the Roman papacy.

For the last few decades, however, Rome's so-called “Holy See” has largely shielded her sexual secrets and perversions from the

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general public. Now that they've surfaced, the scandals go deep and wide. The Roman Catholic Church is a haven for sexual deviants. Protestant ecclesiastics, too, have their share of closet sex scandals, many of which have become public, but nothing in comparison with Roman Catholicism.

The Vatican's doctrines are eerie and her rituals "spooky." If my Lord Jesus is the author of this bizarre system of religion, there's no hope for any of us. She is the mother of all apostasies, the mother of sects, and the "death-cause" of true Christianity.

If you think I might be a little off the wall, a document from the archives of the misnamed "Holy See" has surfaced, formulated in 1962 by a high-ranking Catholic Cardinal, which directs all Bishops to conceal and keep secret all sex acts between Catholic clerics and the children they sexually abuse, plus sex acts between the clergy and brute animals (*The CBS Evening News*, August 3, 2003).

The Roman Catholic hierarchy was devised, not by a righteous God who destroyed whole cities that had wallowed in perverted sex, but by the satanic forces of evil, corruption, and bloodshed. Go to any public library, select a good encyclopedia, and you will find this information. And then go to *2 Thessalonians 2* for more.

LIBERAL PARTY

The second group on our list refers to the latitudinarian, "anything goes" churches. This includes the Episcopal Church, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, and others that are within the libertarian circle. These sects fall within the bounds of "social" or "corporate" churches, where "business as usual" is conducted. Building up their parties and enlarging their coffers are primary to evangelism and helping the world's destitute. Like their mother,

Roman Catholicism, they continue to add more theological waste—sculptures, signs, symbols, clerical institutions, rituals, and creepy formalities—to their partisan rostrums. And like their mother, they compose the apostate church.

EVANGELICAL PARTY

This group of “Bible Thumpers” leaves a bad taste in my mouth. They form what I call the “sensationalists of the century.” They come under the epithet of Baptist Church (all branches), Church of God, Assembly of God, Pentecostal Church, Church of the Nazarene, Grace Bible Church, and other branches that are so earthen-bound they cannot see above the clouds.

This religious fraternity’s favorite creedal wares are: 1) The future Antichrist; 2) The “Rapture”; 3) The Battle of Armageddon, when all the nations of the world invade Israel; 4) The thousand year earthly reign of Jesus on David’s throne in restored Jerusalem, with all of Judaism’s legalistic trappings; 5) Israel’s glorious (past) kingdom reclaimed and reestablished; 6) Jesus’ feet splitting the Mount of Olives in half when He returns; 7) All nations, during the “Millennium,” required to go to Jerusalem to worship and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles—and similar orthodox oddities.

All of the above is *regression*, not *progression*. This group spawns “prophets” and “prophetic interpreters” like Hal Lindsey, Grant Jeffrey, Elwood McQuaid, Pat Robertson, Bill Sutter, Ted Armstrong, the Oral Roberts clan, Ted Haggard, Jim Baker, and a host of others whose sensational messages revolve around symbolic and figurative biblical language. These “earthlings” seem to have a serious problem separating the symbolic from the plain.

These “prophetic interpreters” will turn to the Books of Isaiah,

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Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation, large portions of which are figures of speech or highly symbolic, and they see the day when the leopard will lie down with the goat, the cow will feed with the bear, the wolf and the lamb will cohabit, the lion will eat straw like an ox, and a young child will put his hand into the viper's nest without harm (Isaiah 11).

These "prophets" interpret all these things literally or normally. They fail to discern that the exquisite imagery of Isaiah and other divine prophets *typifies* the Messiah's government in this age, just as Isaiah 53 typifies the Lamb of God who was smitten for our transgressions.

The Lord is saying through the prophet that an age is coming (and now exists) when there will be great peace and happiness in the new kingdom or reign, and it will be *like* a cow feeding with a bear or a wolf that lives with the lamb. Four-footed animals and their environments are not what Isaiah and others are talking about. They are addressing the peace and serenity that will reign in the *hearts* of God's children in the redeemed society or in the era of grace. That time is *now*, and has been for 2000 years.

This party's chieftains will tell you that if you do not sanction and patronize Israel of the Middle East, which they consider God's holy people (in spite of their atheistic history), you are anti-Semitic. The Editor and staff of *Israel My Glory* make this claim. This creedal edict is biblically bereft of reason and a slap in the face of those of us who do not discriminate against Jewish people, yet do not believe Middle East Israel is God's holy nation.

Jesus is now reigning over new Israel—the *redeemed community* (Gal. 6:16). The new Israel was not meant to be materialistic, as terrestrial kingdoms are, and her King was to reign

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in the hearts of His subjects, not from a throne constructed from earthen stones and tangible hardware. Jesus states it far more exquisitely, "*The kingdom [reign] of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom [reign] of God is within you*" (Luke 17:20-21).

Jesus reigns from His throne in heaven and in the hearts of His subjects, not in earthly Jerusalem at a future date. For then people would be able to say, "*Here it is,*" or "*There it is.*" And Jesus says that will not be the case!

When men step into God's role by prophesying future events that are in His hands only, they have, in my opinion, involved themselves in affairs that belong only to God. They dare not do that! Far too many of these "prophetic interpreters" have played around with God's timetable and prophecies for decades and many of them have gotten rich by fleecing God's sheep. If these prophetic enthusiasts hope to exit the apostate church, they will need to take another look at heaven's realities. (For more, see p. 71.)

UNRELENTING DOGMATIST PARTY

This group's leaders pull no punches in announcing to the world that they are the true-blue, authentic, genuine, bona fide one body of believers, as recorded in Ephesians 4:4—and the only body of believers Jesus founded. All others are counterfeit, false, and need to surrender what they have and become members of their church. A few in this category are:

The Latter-Day Saints Church (Mormons), Church of the Nazarene, Jehovah's Witnesses, Orthodox Jewish sects, Unification Church, mainline Church of Christ (*a cappella*), Seventh Day Adventist Church, Independent Christian Churches/

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Disciples of Christ, Lutheran Church, Mennonite Church, Pentecostal Church, and a host of other unbending denominations.

Having been a participant of the *a cappella* Church of Christ exodus decades ago, I can easily understand the predicament of those who are still caught up in these partisan leagues. There will always be a remnant of humble believers who are *in* them but not necessarily *of* them. I want only to give them encouragement and strength—and be tolerant of them, for I was once as they are. It is to the oppressive *systems* and their clerical leaders I direct my opposition, not to those honest hearts enslaved by them. I will continue my efforts to free them from the “Pharaohs”—the kingly clergy and sectarian “teachers of the law.”

Did I leave Jesus when I defected the *Unrelenting Dogmatist* party? Goodness, no! He and I are closer now than ever before. Do I now believe in universal salvation? No. Do I now accept within the brotherhood of believers anyone and everyone? No. But I *do* accept as part of the divine fraternity everyone God accepts. And He accepts all of those who have experienced the new birth and have made Jesus Lord of their lives, regardless of whether they have heard of the Church of Christ, Church of God, Assembly of God, Baptist Church, Methodist Church, or any of the other separatist groups among us.

That Jesus established a new people and set in motion a new Israel, colony, household, congregation, assembly, or community, no student of heaven's testimony will deny. However, we need only read and examine Galatians 5:20 to discover that Jesus is not the founder of religious parties in the likeness of churches. Ambassador Paul placed the “party spirit” alongside drunkenness, immorality, and other evils of the lower nature (RSV).

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So why is the *Unrelenting Dogmatist* party part of the apostate church? The principal reason is that she will not accept those believers who do not parrot her creeds, her conceptions, her ideologies—in short, her doctrinal platform. It makes little or no difference if they carry a blood connection by being blood children of the Lamb. If they do not, or will not, bear the party's flag, wear her labels, promote her creeds, and reverence her clerical elitists, they will remain on the outside gazing in.

CLARIFYING

Lest we become lost in a maze of confusion and derail the primal thrusts of this dialogue, permit me to reintroduce the substance of my objective.

<p>My goal is and has been to demonstrate that the contemporary church, including the one my brother describes, is a counterfeit copy of God's new reign and an apostate system.</p>
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It has been shown that churches are sects or religious parties. Should there be any doubt about my fellow editor's *a cappella* Church of Christ being part of the overall partisan mess, go to www.mindspring.com/~renewal/Counterfeit.html. These Web site features give weight to the plight of Churchianity's dilemmas.

The bottom line is that when we stick our Lord with a religious party, we accuse Him of promoting sectarianism. Jesus cannot be made current head of a church—religious party—without making Moses *former* head of a church, for King James also has a church under him (Acts 7:38). If we say Moses did not have a church, the conclusion follows that Jesus does not have a church and that churches or religious parties are distortions of the Greek *ekklesia*.

SHADY CLAIMS IN OLAN'S SECOND ESSAY

+I have never taught that “functional parts” of God’s *ekklesia* should be discarded. Truth cannot be discarded. +I have never said that nothing good exists within the apostate church. I have said the *system*, which has enslaved God’s children, is corrupt and should be reformed or thrust aside. +As to *who* corrupts the “guide,” the finger is pointed at my co-penman and his fellows, for they have polluted it with their “hand-me-down,” hominid belief system.

+Yes, the verbal and written messages coincide. As noted, the early believers did not have a volume of new scriptures to rely upon. Some of the believers had access to *some* of the apostles’ writings, but they were not widely distributed among the Christian community until the printing press was invented centuries later.

+Yes, the new covenant scriptures that have been handed down through the centuries should be studied, for we can learn from them—and adhered to, if applicable. They give us a glimpse of the activities of the early believers, but they do *not* confer salvation. They tell us of the Man who does. +As the Old Scriptures could not tender salvation, nor can the New Scriptures. The old saints were saved through the sacrifice and grace of their Messiah, just as we are. +The writings of the apostles and prophets *pointed* to the Man of authority and salvation. They were not considered the *means* of salvation or the chief “source of authority.”

+Yes, Jesus worshipped in the Jewish synagogues and in the Jewish Temple, and he called the Temple the “house of God.” Jesus lived and died under the old Law of Moses. He followed the Law perfectly. Has my fellow believer forgotten that he is now living in the era of grace and that God no longer lives in temples

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(church edifices) built by human hands?

+His remarks that Paul in Acts 17 spoke of idols or statues, not church buildings, needs to be addressed. Idols come in different forms. The Catholic's "Holy Water" is an idol. Their crosses are idols. Robert Schuler's *Glass Cathedral* in California is an idol. The *Mormon Temple* in Utah is an idol. It is, in fact, so "sacred" that only certain people are permitted to enter its "holy" bowels. Need I continue?

Consequently, it is safe to advance the idea that if Paul were here in the flesh, he would become distressed all over again to see hundreds of thousands of church structures scattered across our land. To paraphrase Luke, "While Paul was waiting for them in America, he was greatly distressed to see that the country was full of idols"—church edifices (v. 16).

+My brother's straw man in the form of "definitions" relative to the Greek *ekklesia* is just that—a straw man. I have *not* relied on "definitions" to clarify *ekklesia*. I have relied on *translations*, just as he relies on the correct translation of *pascha*—"Passover" (Acts 12:4). King James has "Easter," but my brother will not accept the king's "definition!" But he gladly accepts the king's "church!"

+I do not recall of ever teaching it is wrong to meet in an edifice, as my brother alleged. My position has been expressly clear: *Our church edifices have become our idols*. They are adored, sanctified or set apart, coined the "Lord's house," even by my fellow scribe; looked upon as hallowed creations, and are venerated. The level of "sanctification" and "veneration" varies from sect to sect, but it is plainly visible among all. Our idols must go! Our allegiance to them translates into idolatry.

OLAN'S FOURTH ESSAY

“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God” (1 John 3:1). We should appreciate the beautiful thing God created in the “family of God” arrangement. The privilege of being adopted into that family is the greatest blessing on earth, for it is there that the saving blood of Jesus is applied (Eph. 5:25-26). *“And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”* (1 John 1:3). What a tragic thing it is that men have been inclined to misuse and pervert it through the years, and even now that tendency continues. In so doing, they destroy some of their own greatest blessings.

In the beginning of this dialogue, it was my understanding that my fellow author and I were in agreement on the fact that a serious apostasy has occurred all around us. Our disagreement is not about whether corrupt ways are being practiced. Yet in his *Fourth Essay*, he mounted his soapbox and wasted at least six pages proclaiming the existence of apostasy and giving evidence of it, a point on which we agreed from the first.

Here is our disagreement: I believe his “no church” theology is part of the apostate system, and he believes the *a cappella* church of Christ, which I represent, is part of the apostate system. In all of my essays, I have and am giving statements from the Bible to support my view that Jesus built a church and gave specific directions as to what it is supposed to do. I have given information, which shows that the church of Christ, of which I am a part, is doing exactly that. I thought my friend would try to support his “no church” theology in a similar way, but he has not.

I agree with the idea that we do not want this to degenerate into a debate of the “mud wrestling” sort. I have presented factual information, biblically documented, and have not dealt in personal

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reflections, nor have I employed any debate “tactics.” Proving something by principles of human wisdom would not make it true.

But I believe our readers would get much more benefit from our writings if we would deal responsibly with the question set forth on the book cover, which is: Does either the *a cappella* church of Christ or the “no church” theology accurately represent what Jesus gave Himself to purchase? If so, *which* one? Continuing to level accusations at everyone around does not deal with this question.

THE ORIGINAL IDEA OF PROVING THE CHURCH

“The unrelenting dogmatist party” is what my friend calls his fourth feature of apostasy. It is probably the closest he has come to considering the actual teachings of the church of Christ. The sexual sins of the Catholic Church are not endorsed in churches of Christ. The clergy system of denominationalism is not endorsed in churches of Christ. But this trait—refusal to compromise the doctrine of Christ—is endorsed and practiced in churches of Christ. Our question: *Does the Bible order Christians to be unrelenting in their stand for truth?* I readily admit that I believe it does.

I hope no one thinks I wrote the Bible. I did not issue that order. If God did, I believe I am responsible to obey it. If my friend can show us where God’s word teaches us not to be unrelenting in our stand for the truth, I will feel obligated to obey. But is my friend unrelenting in standing for what he believes is the truth? I doubt that he wants to say it is wrong. Rather, I think he wants to say that we are dogmatic about opinions and interpretations. Good! This gets to the real issue between us. Someone is indeed dogmatic about opinions and interpretations. *Which one?*

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The bottom line is that Jesus said of the eternal word of God that it was not His but the Father's who sent Him. It is exclusive, not all-inclusive, and it is not changeable. The idea of altering it to conform to what men want to think is not mine to give. *"Let God be true but every man a liar"* (Romans 3:4). Yet my friend says the primary reason he thinks the church of Christ is an apostate church is the fact that she does not accept a different doctrinal platform.

This again is a question easily resolved for those who see the Bible as the standard. What does God's word say on this point? *"If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor give him greeting"* (2 John 10). Thus one has to choose between learning from the Bible what the will of God is, and deciding things according to what man thinks is best.

A major problem with my fellow author's "reasoning" is that it is illogical and often outright incorrect. For example, he says that the scriptures "were not widely distributed among the Christians until the printing press was invented centuries later." That would be the 16th century. Does he not know about the hand-written copies that circulated over the known world as early as the second century? He says the "New Covenant scriptures should be studied, for we can learn from them—and adhered to, if applicable." Isn't that a generous view of what God inspired His servants to write? He admits that some of them might have something to say that could help us. But of course they are not as authoritative as the calculated decrees one can find on his Website.

THE AMERICAN RESTORATION MOVEMENT

As the word "ekklesia" indicates, the church is a citizenry, which includes many great blessings and privileges. *"Now,*

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therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph. 2:19). Although some men have perverted this arrangement and exercised authority they did not have, not all men have done so. Many, in trying to make repairs, have made matters worse by imposing their own reasoning and thus producing yet another sect. But some have held more carefully to the word of God as a directive in an effort to recover the original specifications given by the Lord.

The men whom I think did the best job of this were leaders in the movement that began in early America, known as the "restoration movement." The pioneers of that effort were concerned about distortions and perversions, as my friend and co-author says he is. But the response of the restoration leaders was quite different. They did not think that throwing out the whole thing was a solution. Rather, they thought in terms of applying the exact specifications of scripture to correct the misconceptions, which had led to the wrong practices. In this way they sought to restore the original family of God on earth, the church as it was when under apostolic direction. They saw the Bible as the "constitution" of the church, its only standard of authority.

One of the early leaders of this movement was Alexander Campbell, a notable scholar and logician. Again my friend was incorrect concerning him. He did not translate the Version known as *The Living Oracles*, which uses the word "congregation" instead of "church." We find this on the title page: "Translated from the original Greek by Drs. George Campbell, James McKnight, and Philip Doddridge." Alexander preached from this version, but he did not translate it. It is also incorrect to say that he or any of the restoration pioneers rejected the word 'church.'" The "Declaration

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and Address” uses it often. Its statement of purpose says, “...that we may stand with evidence upon the same ground on which the church stood at the beginning.” Campbell used the word regularly in his writings.

If the fellowship of the saints was a beautiful thing, the idea of restoring it is a beautiful thing. The Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of Jesus, and all Christians, as it was put in place by the Lord in the first century, was intended to be available to all people for as long as there is earthly time. But restoring that has to be based on recognition that the scriptures alone are the all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. The restoration pioneers consciously rejected man-made theories, interpretations, and creeds.

THE PRICE OF FOLLOWING HUMAN “LOGIC”

This is by no means the first time people who served as carriers of God’s message were blamed for what the message says. In fact, it is a common thing. Satan uses prejudice in any way he can to oppose God’s word. Thus it is common to hear people say, “O, you think you’re the only ones going to heaven!” Or, “You think you are right and everybody else is wrong!” Sometimes you will even hear someone say, “That can’t be true, because it would mean that my dear old sainted grandma is lost!” This is not unlike the idea that a person who refuses to compromise on Bible statements has an attitude problem. I think Jesus had that problem and so did all of the apostles. My friend classifies it as “unrelenting dogmatism.”

I did not write the Bible, neither did I create the church, and I do not own it. Neither I nor any other man can write a Gospel that has the power to save anyone. I simply received the Bible as the

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Holy Spirit caused it to be written and obeyed—the same Gospel that God sent forth in the first century through Jesus Christ. According to the scriptures, the Lord added me to His church. Jesus is the Head and the Savior. I am a “fellow citizen with the saints and of the household God,” and “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.” This is heaven’s outreach to man and it cannot be duplicated by any power on earth.

This is God’s message and this is what I preach. My motive is the same as Paul’s. “*Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men*” (2 Cor. 5:11). The invitation of God is to accept His word, not the word of any man, and thus to have fellowship with Him and each other. All people are invited to this “feast.”

Satan produces counterfeit duplications to deceive. I want to save you from that. It is ridiculous for men to quarrel incessantly over theories and try to force their opinions. We cannot, by our arguing, make one single thing true that isn’t, nor can we make one thing untrue that is true. It is simple to look at what the word of God says and try to understand it. Prejudice and a factious attitude, which Satan tries to put into our hearts, must be refused. We need to realize that if someone helps us to find a mistake we have made, or that we have embraced a wrong idea, that is not a defeat, but a victory.

Truth is not affected by the fact that men may classify it as “dogmatic, partisan, or unkind.” Considering the stated will of Almighty God is a different thing to making preferential choices among material things. To illustrate: The law of gravity is not optional. If a man jumps out of an airplane at 20,000 feet without a parachute, regardless of how sincere he may be, the law of gravity will not be turned off to accommodate him. He will almost surely

die. When a man, for whatever reason, goes under water and does not come up for air, whether it is fair or unfair, he will die. What God has spoken remains a fact regardless of the opinions of men. As Paul wrote, "*Let God be true but every man a liar.*"

But concerning biblical laws, grace is also in the picture. If God wants to blot out a sin I committed, he has the power to do so. But He has not assigned men to make such judgments. It is one thing to say that God will forgive honest mistakes; it is a different thing to say that He has no laws we must accept. The doctrine called "lawlessness" will not pass the judgment (2 Thess. 2:9-12). "*I never knew you. Depart from me, you who practice lawlessness*" (Matt. 7:23).

APOSTASY CAN ORIGINATE IN A DESIRE TO REFORM

Sadly, the noble precepts of the restoration movement eventually fell into misuse by some. Around the beginning of the 20th century, the quest to restore the truth turned into a belief that we have restored absolute truth and no further searching is needed. Our "traditions" came to be thought of as God's appointed way. By the middle of that century a hermeneutic known as the "authority of inferences" had become entrenched, and leading men were declaring their interpretations to be a part of the Bible.

In reaction to this and other practices that had developed, a large part of the church adopted a negative stance on many matters. This group called themselves the "non-institutional church." It featured the opposing of cooperative efforts among churches, such as multi-church support of radio and TV programs, the building of orphan homes and homes for the aged, and other "institutional" projects. They believed that reformation was again necessary to set things right.

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From within this “non-institutional church” yet another “reform” element sprang up. They decided that the non-institutional church was itself an apostasy and, in fact, that all churches were apostate. They concluded there should not be a church. It has now become a full-fledged faction, with yet another set of regulations and a complete doctrinal system. They withdrew from the church, believing to have found the truth.

I applaud the desire for reformation. It is a good thing. But when those efforts are based on human theories and judgments, they are not reformation; they become yet another branch of apostasy. My friend says he relies on translations. But 95 percent of them render “ekkllesia” as “church.” He rejects that. In his self-assertiveness, he often ends up doing many of the same things he rebelled against and condemned in others.

For instance, the “no church” group usually has a primary leader, or minister, though they would not call him that for the world. In the home meeting, he usually does most of the teaching and directs the activities of the group. The rest of the group is “spoon fed,” while believing they are all “ministers” of equal rank. He teaches them that Christians are wrong in having a minister, are apostate if they meet in a building, and that their church leaders are “Pharaohs.”

The bottom line problem is a lack of recognition of the absolute sovereignty of God. We need to face the question, “*Whose church is it?*” Yes, we need to abandon something, but not God’s creation. We need to abandon all human substitutions, including the “no church” theological system. The divinely ordained Christian way, as set forth in the Bible, is the only one that is valid. It is the only one that has the authority of God behind it. It is the only one to which God adds those who obey His Gospel and are saved.

BUFF'S FIFTH ESSAY

If we reflect upon what has been addressed and corroborated by heaven's declarations thus far, I think it is safe to say that the early *ekklesia* was not composed of sects, denominations, churches, or religious parties. God's colony of redeemed sinners functioned as a humane and evangelistic community. Their meetings were informal but orderly, serious and alive, responsive, and mutually managed. Ours are "services," as at a funeral, largely non-responsive and non-stimulating.

MISSING PARTS

The early meetings were bereft of pulpits, collections to buy and maintain flashy edifices and to keep an elite pulpiteer vocationally afloat, ritualistic nonsense, and pew-sitters. Their environment was family-like. Our gatherings resemble *formal* business meetings, where business or worship doesn't begin until the hands on the clock are at a certain crossroads. Our overall anatomy mirrors a corporation, an institution, not a compassionate community of concerned ones.

What dissimilarity! We have *retrogressed*, not *progressed*. We have traded the holy for the common, the celestial for the terrestrial, the spiritual for the materialistic, the sacred for the plain. Yet there are many receptive and seeking hearts within the corridors of the apostate church. God will deliver them, if they are willing to remove their soiled garments and replace them with garments of reconciliation. His children no longer need wallow in the partisan litter of the religious establishment, for God will raise up reformers to rescue His elect. He always has. He always will.

But it isn't likely He will penetrate the divisive armor of those whose hearts are solidly enslaved by the institutional church, and

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whose deep-seated infirmity is “mad church disease.” The divisive spirit is a work of our carnal nature. It is reflected thusly: “*We are right and others are wrong; we are the only church Jesus founded; no one else regards the Bible as the only source of authority as we do; all of our teachings are from the Bible and are error free.*”

As long as this separatist spirit lingers within the contemporary church, she will never be able to apply a healing balm to “mad church disease.” Freedom in Jesus will always escape those who parrot this mindset and exhibit a cliquish spirit.

WHERE FREEDOM RESIDES

It is indeed a rarity to find freedom in the apostate church. The reason is that the party line must be parroted, her precepts supported, her traditions preserved, and the “church system” idolized. If we veer a little to the right or lean a little to the left, we will soon be verbally disciplined and told to shape up or ship out—or worse. This is not freedom—it is bondage. To find a man who is truly free to speak his mind and heart while employed by a church, or by one of her organizations, is like looking for shelter in a hailstorm. Even pew-sitting peasants are not allowed the freedom to speak their heart and mind without ecclesiastical reprisal.

The only way to be free in Jesus is to cast off our shackles and disavow the sectarian systems—religious parties—that have subjugated us, and that includes *all* of them, even my co-editor’s *a cappella* Church of Christ party. This I have done. This I will not undo. No church or religious organization upon the face of planet Earth has one bit of control over my life, my mind, or my beliefs. I will no longer be a bondservant to any of them. My only Master is Jesus—and He alone. I will forever be His slave. I refuse to bow to any other. “Give me freedom or give me death” will always be

my cry. For without freedom to think, to dissent, to investigate, and to question, our walk with the Lord would be hard to negotiate.

GETTING SIDE-TRACKED

I was hoping this dual project would not evolve into a “tick-tack-toe” game and a “free-for-all,” but it seems to be headed in that direction. That discourages me. My co-author has been a public debater most of his life. Apparently, his “cake” is to back his “opponent” into a corner and “whip the socks off him.” But that will not happen here. Lest he lose his footing and objective entirely, I suggest he return to his initial resolve to corroborate his “Authentic Church.” I will, in turn, continue my review of the “Apostate Church.”

Yes, each of us will need to clarify and, on occasions, respond to allegations and/or misrepresentations and inaccuracies—*as I need to do in this chapter*. But that should not become our main force. If I were to respond to all of my brother’s misrepresentations and misuse of heaven’s testimony, the scriptures, it would take volumes.

I would also encourage my brother to examine himself and evaluate the way he is coming over, for he presents himself as one who has acquired all knowledge of the subject under scrutiny and, for that reason, cannot be wrong. He portrays his concepts as being infallible. The self-righteous Pharisees in Jesus’ day advanced the same demeanor. I came out of this mindset decades ago when I championed the *a cappella* Church of Christ party, the same denomination my brother now champions and calls “authentic,” and I feel uncomfortable in its presence.

In saying that many of my brother’s claims are inaccurate, I do

not wish to imply that heaven's attestations are inaccurate. Heaven's declarations are trustworthy, but our *conceptions* of those declarations are often off-center. My fellow writer quotes numerous scriptures. That's fine, so long as he applies them accurately. For when he does not give them the correct application (as will be shown), he is promoting his personal theories. The same principle, of course, relates equally to me.

SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

To better understand what I have advocated thus far, and what my *precise* stance is on a diversity of points that have been inaccurately portrayed by my brother, I submit the following:

1) When we build walls around a doctrinal platform, *whether based on truth or fallacy*, and reject those believers who do not conform to that platform, we become a sect or religious party. The party spirit of Galatians 5:20 is a separatist attitude that generates division. Doctrinal misunderstandings do not always give birth to schisms. *But rejecting other believers who do not embrace our doctrinal platform does give birth to sects/religious parties*. My brother's *a cappella* Church of Christ is a fitting exemplification.

2) King James took a Greek term, *ekklesia* (congregation, assembly, community), and corrupted its translation by attaching "church" to it, just as he took another Greek term, *pascha* (Passover), and disfigured its translation by fastening "Easter" to it. "Easter" is responsible for a segment of partisan religion, and "church" is responsible for religious parties or sects. If the Holy Spirit disapproves of one corrupted translation, He disapproves of both. No tossing of the coin will change this fact.

To reject "Easter" because of its being a corrupt rendering of the

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Greek *pascha* (Passover) while playing bosom-buddy to “church,” a corrupted translation of the Greek *ekklesia* (congregation, assembly, community), is incompatible with good exegesis. In playing this kind of game, my brother’s squabble relating to “no church theology” collapses and becomes a dead issue.

3) The great Apostle Paul (while Saul) did not try to “destroy the church,” as per King James’ Acts 8:3. There were no church groups to destroy, for they did not come upon the scene until centuries later. But he *did* try to destroy God’s congregation or people—the “called out.” Perhaps Saul also tried to destroy “Easter!” Not likely, for Roman Catholicism concocted our modern-day “Easter” centuries later, just as Churchianity arrived later. But speaking of destruction, today’s apostate church *needs* to be demolished, should she refuse reform.

4) I am not trying to destroy God’s people by striving to reform the *systems* that have made them “bricklayers” under the “Pharaohs”—pulpit ministers and other clerical elitists.

5) If judgment day is going to be held on the basis of certain books, as my fellow scribe’s scenario evinced, will the Lord choose the Bible, Olan Hicks’ Marriage/Divorce/Remarriage books, or my *Reformation Rumbblings* column? I introduce this question here because my brother made a big splash of it (pgs. 48 & 49). Those pages are worthy of a second reading!

6) In the grace era, a committed believer’s worship never ends. It is incessant. It cannot be confined to special locations or restricted to certain hours. Whatever believers “do to the glory of God” and “in the name of Jesus,” whether inside or outside our meeting places, is worship (1 Cor. 10:31 & Col. 3:17). It would be a difficult task to do something “for the glory of God” and “in His

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name” without worshipping. Jesus said as much when He informed the woman at the well that the time would come when worship would be anytime and the place where we are (John 4:24). Worship cannot be turned on and off like a water faucet. It is the *whole* of a believer’s life.

But the apostate church wants her devotees to “worship at the church,” for that is where the gold-plated collection plates are passed! And they need our money to pay for the edifice idol and to finance the employment of a professional hireling. I was once part of this system when I “pulpit-eered” for the same religious party my brother currently promotes and is trying to authenticate.

7) Paul is never once identified as *the* minister at Corinth. In trying to validate the apostate church’s clergy system by attributing this “office” to the Apostle Paul is a step in the direction of biblical twisting. Why would Paul advise believers to practice “mutual edification” but then become the *exclusive* edifier at Corinth (Romans 14:19)? Why would he tell the Roman and Colosse believers to “instruct *one another*” and to “teach and admonish *one another*” but then presume to be *the* teacher and *sole* instructor at Corinth (Rom. 15:14 & Col. 3:16)? Why would he admonish the Thessalonians to “encourage *one another* and build *each other* up” if at Corinth he was employed as *the* encourager and *the* builder (1 Thess. 5:11)?

Yes, the great apostle was *a* minister wherever he went, but never the *exclusive* minister at any location. Yes, he often met with other believers and dialogued with them, as he did with the believers at Troas (Acts 20:7). But his foremost function at *any* locale was reaching the lost—*evangelism*. He was an apostle to the Gentiles, a minister among ministers, a priest among priests, a servant among servants; but never *the* priest or *the* servant.

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Another matter my brother needs to consider is if a man can be imported and hired to do all or most of the teaching (“preaching”), another man may be hired to do all or most of the singing, another to do all or most of the praying, and still another to do all or most of the encouraging. The principle that applies to one applies to all. Any aspect of this foreign arrangement interrupts the “one another” model as clearly outlined in heaven’s affirmations.

8) It is not a question of whether some were financially supported in the early days of the New Way, for we agree that evangelists and full-time shepherds received support. If we carefully review the context of Paul’s remarks in 1 Corinthians 9, it is clear that he is alluding to those who proclaim the Good News to unbelievers—*evangelists*. He is not even a “42nd cousin” close to talking about the modern-day ecclesiastical pulpit minister. This function did not surface until Roman Catholicism designed it.

9) Is salvation available outside “the church”? Not according to my co-author (p. 19). *What he means to say is that salvation is not available outside the church with which he is aligned!* But *which* Church of Christ (*a cappella*) is the right one? There are at least 12 of them. And each one makes the same claim my brother makes.

10) Our initial agreement was that we give our book two titles: *The Apostate Church* and *The Authentic Church*. There was no other title agreement. Our book’s title is not *The No Church Theology*. That “title” wasn’t even discussed.

11) Today’s *a cappella* Church of Christ has little resemblance to the reformation movement in early America, led by Thomas and Alexander Campbell. The two are worlds apart. The former movement accepted all of God’s children; the latter group accepts only those who adopt their doctrinal agenda.

OLAN'S FIFTH ESSAY

"We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). I am not in the business of "socks-beating," and never have been. Actually, there is a lot to appreciate in my fellow author. I believe him when he says he loves the Lord and wants to serve Him as a reformer. That is a good intention. I believe him when he says he hates to see people led off into apostasy. I do, too. I just believe he has been sold a bill of goods, that his good intentions have been misdirected by accepting some wrong premises. The reason I can say they are wrong is not because I am so wise, but because they contradict the wisdom of God as revealed in the Bible. The best friend you have is the one who will tell you the truth. By pointing out these errors, I hope to persuade him and others to return to the sheepfold, to the flock of God, of which Jesus is the Shepherd.

A spirit of reform can become a spirit of rebellion. In this case, it seems to be rebellion against all authority, even the authority of God. My co-author boasts, "No church or religious organization upon planet Earth has one bit of control over my life, my mind, or my beliefs" (Page 73). Think about the implications of that. The Lord's church is the visible expression of the authority of Christ on earth, and that is the very thing he and his fellows reject. My friend denies that he rejects His authority and claims the opposite is true, that allegiance to Him is the very centerpiece of his position.

But look at the facts. He and his fellows deny that Jesus has a church and say they accept Him as "Jesus the man," not as Jesus the Head of the church. They seem to think of His spiritual body as an unidentifiable host of individuals, hopelessly scattered over the world in all the various apostate sects. To them, fellowship exists only in "the little group that meets in our living room." My friend says we should all leave the fellowship of the whole church and "put on garments of reconciliation by retreating to a small living

room meeting. What a contradiction in logic!

Paul wrote that God “gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23). Jesus clearly denounced the notion that He can be accepted as an abstraction, apart from obedience to His word. In Luke 6:46, He asked, “*Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do the things I say?*” Take another look at John 12:48.

They keep tripping over the word “church.” The meaning of that word relates directly to fellowship in Christ. Scholars believe it came from a German word, which means, “of the Lord”—related to “kurios.” If Jesus is accepted as Lord, it reflects the idea behind the phrase, “church of Christ,” the church of which Christ is head. The Bible does not teach that He can be accepted as an abstraction. That is one of the mistaken premises to which I referred.

When most people hear or see the word “church,” they think of Christ and of God. Therefore, this may be the most appropriate of all English expressions to refer to the Lord’s people. The word “church” does not mean the Catholic hierarchy. It does not mean the denominational system. It does not mean a building. It means “a mystic body” (Webster).

My friend dismisses my analysis of “ekklesia” as meaningless and insists that it means “congregation.” Can you believe that? I gave verifiable facts, not opinions. The definition of “ekklesia” is “called out,” from the Greek “ek” and “kaleo.” That is a fact. To dispute it is foolish. “Called out” is not the definition of the word “congregation.” It is not the definition of the word “assembly,” or of the word “church.” These are things to which “ekklesia” can rightly be applied, not its definition. These words stand or fall together. The same reasoning that justifies one will justify the

other. To say one translates “ekklesia” and the other does not is nonsense.

Jesus identified Himself with the church when He told Saul of Tarsus that in trying to destroy the church he was persecuting Him. To the objective mind it is clear that to reject the idea that a church exists belonging to Him is to reject the biblical picture of who Jesus is. As we have said, to reject His authority is to reject Him.

DEBATE OR NOT TO DEBATE IS THE QUESTION

My friend says we do not want this to become a debate, and then gives me eleven debate-type arguments. Okay, for purposes of clarification, I will give my views on each by his submissions.

1) Should we build walls around a doctrinal platform? Can't we look this up in the Bible? *“Preach the word. Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long suffering and teaching”* (2 Tim. 4:2). *“Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which you learned and avoid them”* (Rom.16:17). Jesus did not come to earth as a neutral, and His church is not to be neutral.

2) Is the word “church” incorrect because “Easter” is? How about this for classic reasoning? Again, look it up. Scholars agree that *pascha* means Passover, not “Easter.” That is solid ground for rejecting “Easter.” The same scholars agree that “church” renders “ekklesia.” Is their understanding any good on this word?

3) Did Saul of Tarsus try to destroy the church? Again, let's look it up. Ninety-five percent of Bible translations say he did. *“I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy*

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it" (Gal. 1:13).

4) Is my co-author trying to destroy God's people? He is trying to eliminate the church, which consists of God's people. It is my hope that, like Saul of Tarsus, his zeal can be redirected.

5) Will God judge us in the last day by our writings or by the Bible? Look it up. "*The words that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*" (John 12:48). No words of men will be on the Judge's bench.

6) Is worship incessant, consisting of all we do to glorify God? This is another of those premises rooted in a misunderstanding. In Matthew 4:10, Jesus stated two things we must do in this regard: "*You shall worship (proskuneo) the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve*" (*letreuo*). The first word means to prostrate oneself. The second word means to do acts of service. My friend confuses the two. For a fuller explanation on this point, turn back to page 50.

7) If a preacher is supported to do the preaching, does it mean that one could be hired to do the singing, the praying, and the encouraging? This is more faulty reasoning. The Bible specifically commands those who are gifted in ministry to minister, "preach the word." God's word specifies that those who do that have a right to be supported—but not so of singing and praying. All are commanded to sing and pray.

8) Is the command to support those who preach the Gospel to be applied only to those who preach to unbelievers? Not only is this an assumption, it contradicts biblical statements. For instance, Paul told the Corinthians that he "robbed other churches, taking

wages of them to minister to you” (2 Cor. 11:8). Acts 18:11 tells us he was there “a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.” Did they remain unbelievers all that time? This assumption would mean that if a non-Christian is in our assembly and we wanted to teach him the Gospel, we would have to ask all Christians to leave the room while we teach him, lest they should hear the Gospel again and *accidentally* be “evangelized!”

9) There are different groups claiming to be the church of Christ. Does this mean salvation is available outside the church? Again, we must look for answers to questions about spiritual things in the Bible, not in human reasoning. In Ephesians 2:12, Paul refers back to a time when they were “strangers from the covenant of promise,” and says their condition was “having no hope and without God in the world.” Then he said that being “fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God” changed all of that.

10) Is the “no church theology” a part of the scope of our study? As my brother says, we are discussing *The Apostate Church* and *The Authentic Church*. He believes the church of Christ is apostasy and I believe the “no church theology” is apostasy. We are on target.

11) Does the *a cappella* church of Christ have little resemblance to the reformation movement led by the Campbells? That movement produced the church of Christ. When people take the scriptures as their only rule of faith and practice, a church of Christ will be produced. If they accepted all who claimed to be God’s children, why did they launch a restoration movement?

The underlying problem here is an attitude toward the written New Testament, which regards it as mere words of advice, not divine decrees. Human theory is displacing the Lord’s headship.

REJECTING BIBLICALLY-APPOINTED FUNCTIONS

ASSEMBLING: The biblical command is to not forsake this practice (Heb. 10:25). The example in Acts 20:7 sees the disciples coming together on the first day of the week to break bread. Paul criticized the Corinthians for not properly observing this as a purpose for coming together (1 Cor. 11:17-20). But the theory that seeks to eliminate the church reverses this. They say the whole church should not come together in one place (see 1 Cor. 11:20), that the only right way is to disperse into small groups and, in effect, sever connections with the rest of the body.

SHEPHERDS OR OVERSEERS: Paul told the elders at Ephesus that the Holy Spirit had made them “overseers,” or bishops, over the flock of God, and therefore they must “shepherd the church of the Lord and of God, which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:17-28). But my friend refers to them as “Pharaohs” and denounces the whole idea of having such oversight.

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH: Paul also told them that grievous wolves would enter, “not sparing the flock,” and “also from among yourselves men will arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). He added that for three years he himself had warned “everyone night and day with tears.” Jude said it was necessary to urge the brethren to “contend earnestly for the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). But my fellow author says a mark of apostasy is when church of Christ leaders do not accept believers who have a different doctrinal platform. He calls it “unrelenting dogmatism.” False prophets are not just innocent brethren with a little different opinion. False doctrines are not just harmless options. Jesus warned us to be aware of them. And so did the apostles.

PREACH THE WORD: Paul told Timothy to preach the word “*in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine*” (2 Tim. 4:2). In verse 5, he said, “*Do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*” He told him, “*If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ.*” But my friend calls that spoon-feeding. “We cannot have a minister to instruct us. We must all be ministers.” Timothy was both a minister and an evangelist. Is there a difference?

FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY: An oft-repeated theme throughout the New Testament is our need for fellowship and support from each other, that we should avoid causing anyone to stumble, and to keep unity in an atmosphere of love. It amazes me that anyone could think that unity is achieved by separating into little groups and severing contact with other believers. That is some remarkable “logic.”

THE PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH: The church is not a social club, or a political party, or a commercial business. It is a teaching mission. Man does not know his own way, including my fellow author and me. It is not our assignment to go into the world and teach everybody what they already believe. It is our assignment to bring light by alerting everyone to the wisdom of God, as revealed in His word. The world needs to learn better ways. If we do not teach them, who will?

It is clear that the present theology, which would eliminate the church, is a thorough rejection of the basic functions that have been assigned to the church. It would make the spiritual body of Christ into something very different from the specifications delivered by the apostles.

CAN WE FIND THE LORD AND HIS PEOPLE TODAY?

Suppose a man hears about Jesus and wants to come to Him. How does he do it? He reads the Bible and finds where people on Pentecost day posed this question and received the apostles' answer. He repents and is baptized in the name of Christ for the remission of sins. He believes the Lord added him to the number of the saved. Now he is a member of the Lord's "ekklesia."

By checking *Webster's Dictionary*, he finds that in English the word for that is "church." Further study of the Bible tells him that he is supposed to assemble regularly with other members of that body. So he sets out to find the church of Christ. He checks out the Catholic Church and finds it is not on track with the New Testament. He checks out the Baptist church and all the others and finds that they, too, are biblically off course. He rejects all of them.

Then he comes upon someone from the "no church" group. He asks him, "Are you the church of Christ?" He replies, "No, we do not believe there is such a thing." He asks, "Do you have a minister?" He answers, "No, we do not believe in that, either." He also rejects this as apostate.

Then he finds a building where the sign reads, "Church of Christ." He asks the minister, "Is this a church of Christ?" He answers, "Yes. This church belongs to Christ." He then asks, "Are you baptized believers?" He answers "Yes" again. "Then you have done the same things I have done. Are you following the New Testament as your only authority?" The minister says, "Yes." This man has found the Lord and His people! You can, too, if you stick with the Bible.

BUFF'S SIXTH ESSAY

The decline of Christianity seemed to have had its genesis when the professional clergy and church structures were introduced. As chronicled earlier, it was 200 years or longer before the first church building was built. The clergy system developed earlier. The first century believers met in homes and in public places. When Satan finally convinced them to build edifices to “conduct worship services” and to employ ecclesiastical elitists to bottle-feed them, he shut the doors and locked them in. Since then, evangelism has largely lost its punch among our various church divisions.

A STIMULATING NARRATIVE

The story goes of a large family—parents, eight children, and seven grandchildren—who met on a weekly basis to strengthen family bonds. They all lived within a short distance of each other. In each meeting they discussed a diversity of interests—problems, finances, future outreaches, their walk with the Lord, health, and other related topics. The parents functioned as leaders, advisors, and shepherds. This continued every week, month after month.

One day, while they all were sharing experiences, talking about the Lord, reading scripture, and exchanging ideas, their elder father called for their attention. Everyone hushed, and he began to speak.

“Dear ones,” he said, “your Mom and I have decided to place before you a proposition. She and I feel we all need fresh thoughts, new ideas, and heightened approaches in our family discussions. Consequently, we would like to bring in a seminary graduate to share with us what he has learned from his studies. We met him this week and he appears to be of noble blood. If we employ him, I think our weekly dialogues would be enhanced. If you will approve of this arrangement,” he said, “each of us will pledge to

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give a specific amount of money each week toward his living expenses—food, house rent, utilities, medical insurance, retirement plan, gasoline and repair for his vehicle, and vacation disbursements. Tell us what you think of this idea.”

By this time all of the family members, except for Mom and Dad, were squirming in their seats. The oldest daughter motioned for the floor.

“What is the meaning of this?” she asked. “We are *family*. We enjoy our family discussions and exchanges. We have freely shared our love and our ideas with each other for years, and each of us has been encouraged to live a closer walk with the Lord and with each other. It has cost us nothing, except for the contributions we all have gladly made toward evangelism and feeding the destitute. So why in heaven’s name should we be saddled with keeping a stranger financially afloat while he tells us what we already know?”

One of the sons spoke up. “If we were to import and financially support a man to do what we are capable of doing ourselves, which would be nonsense, it would weigh heavily upon our ability to contribute toward evangelism and to alleviate the needs of the genuinely hungry.”

He added, “Let us continue what we have been doing through the years and encourage this fellow to find a job and go to work. We will assist him in finding adequate employment. If, after he is employed and settled in, he wishes to join us for our weekly discussions, we would welcome him and treat him as one of us.”

The other family members agreed. The father, seeing that his proposal was going nowhere, tabled the idea and t h a n k e d the

family for their input.

THE CHICKENS COME HOME TO ROOST

If you have not grasped the connection by now, allow me to assist you. The early believers formed family-like clusters in homes. To reach others, they frequented public places—open markets and Jewish Synagogues. The scriptures, such as 1 Corinthians 14, strongly indicate that their meetings were conducted in the format I have described in the story, where openness abounded and mutual dialoguing was prevalent.

To take my narrative a step further, let us suppose the group's shepherds had recommended that the family build a church edifice to influence "outsiders" to join them in their weekly parleys. "To erect one that would delight the eyes," the father says, "at least three hundred thousand dollars—or more—would be required. If we wish to keep up with the times and compete with other groups that have built elegant places to meet, we really should seriously consider sacrificing for the occasion."

In response, I can almost hear one of the children say, "Dad, we have the only meeting place we need. And it's already paid for! If our group increases and a lack of space arises, we'll start another house meeting. It is the *Gospel* that entices receptive hearts, not images like church structures, crosses, and statues."

The picture is clear. The apostate church, including my brother's sect, has the whole thing reversed. If we were shooting for the *opposite* of what heaven approves, we hit the bull's eye.

"EASTER" vs. "CHURCH"

My brother asked, "Is the word 'church' incorrect because

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'Easter' is? Scholars agree that *pascha* means Passover, not 'Easter.' That is solid ground for rejecting 'Easter.' The same scholars agree that 'church' renders 'ekklesia' " (p. 81).

I see a problem here. If *ekklesia* correctly delivers "church," King James' "scholars" placed one under both Moses and David (Acts 7:38 & Heb. 2:12). But my brother says a church "did not exist back there" (p. 17). Am I seeing double? I think he might as well accept King James' "Easter," too. The apostate system revolves around the king's "church," as well as the king's "Easter."

MISREPRESENTATIONS APLENTY

"Yet my friend says the primary reason he thinks the church of Christ is an apostate church is the fact that she does not accept a different doctrinal platform" (P. 66).

This is totally incorrect. It is because his *a cappella* denomination refuses to accept other believers.

"For instance, the 'no church' group usually has a primary leader, or minister...In the home meeting, he usually does most of the teaching and directs the activities of the group. The rest of the group is 'spoon fed,' while believing that they are all 'ministers' of equal rank" (P. 71).

This is incorrect and misleading. All house meetings of which I have participated, or know about, are the opposite of what my brother alleges. There are no pulpits or elite ministers.

A lack of space in this sixth and final *Essay* will not allow me to address an additional mass of misrepresentations and distortions. Each of Olan's pages contains them. I wish it were otherwise.

OLAN'S SIXTH ESSAY

“But even if our Gospel is hidden it is hidden to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Cor. 4:3-4). How does Satan do this blinding? One of his most successful ways is prejudice. It seems, from what you say, that many of you have allowed your resentment of abusive brethren to blind your eyes so that what God says is hidden, regardless of how clearly it might be stated.

I have experienced such abuses many times. In certain areas of Eastern Kentucky and Eastern Tennessee, I have seen men who could barely read, issue between spits of tobacco, words of rude condemnation against fellow Christians and against all who did not accept their ideas. I have heard sermons in which the word of God was twisted to justify the conclusion that “only our little group is right,” and to justify the practice of self-righteous judgment against all who disagree with “our” interpretations. I can certainly understand how a person might thus become disgusted. But if it makes you disgusted with things God has said, Satan has won your soul.

Believe it or not, I have seen similar features in some folks of the “no church” persuasion. I have seen men declare emphatically that “ekklesia” is mistranslated when it is rendered “church.” These are men who would not recognize a Greek letter if they met one on the road. But they are risking their souls on what someone has preached to them. In most cases, the preacher didn’t know anything about Greek, either. They also affirm the other tenets of this idea irresponsibly and demand their acceptance. I have also experienced liberals who preach a lot about “tolerance,” but do not have much of it. They quickly condemn all who believe we should

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be concerned about doctrinal accuracy. They also twist the scriptures to make God out to be all-indulgent, without wrath, and to make His word into an approval of just about anything anyone wants to believe. Bookshelves are full of such propaganda, and so are the TV airways. But God's word still says "lawlessness" will not pass the judgment (Matt. 7:23). There are many false notions out there. How are you going to decide which is right?

"The word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12). "*So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth. It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it*" (Isaiah 55:11). Many do not know this about God's word.

I urge you to look to God's revelation to determine His will in all things. The only way we can authenticate spiritual things is approval from God. The only source of approval from God is the written word, which He gave by inspiration to those who were chosen to be His final representatives on earth (2 Timothy 3:16). The only source of their writing is the Bible. The fact that it is not written in the form of a statutory Book of Law does not change the fact that it is from God and it *does* reveal His will for man. The fact that it was first delivered verbally and not written down until later does not mean that the word, either spoken or written, was or is invalid.

No wonder Jesus warned, "*Beware of false prophets*" (Matt. 7:15). No wonder John said we must be careful what we believe, "*For many false prophets are gone out into the world*" (1 John 4:1). The apostle Paul said that even "*Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light,*" and therefore it is no surprise that "*his ministers*

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are transformed as the ministers of righteousness, whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor. 11:14-15). How can one, in the face of these warnings, think that it is wise to be receptive to "other children of God" who believe and teach a different doctrine?

But be assured, God said truthfully that His word would not fail. Regardless of what men do, the pure word of God is still living and powerful. God still adds those who obey it to the church, the visible expression of the authority He gave to Christ on earth.

"Then those who gladly received His word were baptized and that day about three thousand souls were added to their number" (Acts 2:41). *"And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved"* (v. 47). Satan has many devices, but John wrote the truth, *"Greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world"* (1 John 4:4). *"Buy the truth and sell it not"* (Prov. 23:23).

I have also experienced congregations in which love abounded, where the Bible is respected, and the elders serve at personal sacrifice, putting the well being of others above their own. In most cases, they are not supported financially. They give themselves freely

Yes, there are faithful servants of God. The Lord's church ought not be judged by vain and perverse men who misuse what God has given. Paul wrote that such men do not represent God but "their own bellies" (Romans 16:17). When the way of God is truly followed, it is a beautiful thing—a contrast to false ways. It should not be surprising that something this meaningful to the saving of souls would be a high priority on Satan's "to destroy" list. Do not let him destroy this beautiful creation God has given us.

Olan's Sixth Essay

The theory that would eliminate the church is out of tune with the entire Bible, from end to end. God has always required His people to assemble and worship Him. In the earliest times, each patriarch built an altar where the entire household, including servants, would gather and worship God. When God's people became a nation, He prescribed a "tent of meeting" where they assembled regularly and God would meet them there. Later, the Temple was built, according to instructions from God. When it was destroyed or damaged, God directed the reconstructing of it and often expressed concern about its being maintained. Around the time Jesus came to earth, synagogues were built as places of worship. God did not order them, but He accepted them as he had accepted the altars of the patriarchs.

When Jesus spoke about the coming worship in His kingdom, He spoke in terms of assembling for worship. He said, "*Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them*" (Matt. 18:20). Do not forsake the assembling together; Jesus will meet you there. He told the Samaritan woman the time was coming when the place would not be specified, such as at Jerusalem or on the Samaritan mountain, but that worship would be in spirit and in truth, "*for the Father is seeking such to worship Him*" (John 4:23). This is from "proskuneo," to bow before Him. In fact, when He said He would build His spiritual family, He called it an "ekklesia," a word that refers to a called-out assembly.

I have shown repeatedly that the idea of removing the church is based on misunderstandings, half truths, and the substituting of human rationalizations for the expressly stated will of God. Now, as my final plea, I ask you to think about this: Unless you can create the universe in six days, trying to give God advice doesn't make much sense. His word is the only word. Please accept it.

Olan's Summation

The Lord's church has human members, so misconduct occurs. But there are many church members who want to serve unselfishly. I like to think I am one of them. I have written my part of this book, hoping it will help you, because I care. What you do with it is your choice. If there is not a good church near you, you can start one. The "seed," the word of God, will produce now what it did in the first century. Theories of men have no power to save anyone.

Here is a brief review to think about: **1)** The meaning of the word "church" is not the Catholic hierarchy, not the denominational clergy system, and not ugly-spirited brethren. It means the people who belong to Christ. **2)** It is irrational to reason that since King James ordered that "church" to be retained in his KJV, it must be wrong. **3)** It is inconsistent to reject "church" as a translation of "ekklesia," because it does not mean "called out," and accept "congregation," which also does not mean "called out." **4)** It is presumptuous to rule that the use of a church building constitutes idolatry. Jesus worshipped in the Temple, a very elaborate "edifice," and called it the "House of God." Was idolatry acceptable in the Old Testament, but wrong in the new?

Finally, the New Testament uses the term "ekklesia" to refer to God's people under Moses and also under David. "Church" is not its only usage, for it is applied to different kinds of assemblies. In the New Testament, the church is the earthly expression of the authority God gave to Jesus Christ. To reject that church is to reject what God appointed. The choice is between the written word of God and human speculation. God did not give a ruling on *who* can preach *what* to *whom*. I urge you to discard speculation, not God's word.—*Olan Hicks*.

Buff's Summation

In this endeavor, I have attempted to describe the pathetic plight of the contemporary church by divulging symptoms that clearly point to an apostasy. No church or religious party is exempt—not even “The Authentic Church,” as publicized in this undertaking.

When God came down and disrupted the language of the people at the building of the Tower of Babel, they groped about in the darkness of confused tongues. Today's clerics, popes, “Reverends, and churchy pulpit elitists have constructed another “Tower of Babel” in the configuration of churches and religious jargon. Considering our divisive plight and language barrier, it is no surprise that so many are groping about in spiritual darkness.

The one body of believers, which was once pure and tranquil when originally founded by Jesus and His ambassadors, has evolved into an apostate system of religion. Unless she undergoes complete reform, she will eventually self-abort. Although she once shined as a bright light, she is now only a flicker.

If reformation ever reaches its zenith within her borders, it will be because we rediscovered and recaptured the vocabulary of the Holy Spirit. For when we build sectarian walls around a bogus term like “church,” allege that our Lord erected those walls, and deny entrance to other believers who do not carry our label and mouth our brand, as my co-author has done in this venture, we become puppets of the apostate church. And that is what this message is all about.

I wish brother Hicks no harm, and I do not question his sincerity; but I must say that in all of my life, I have never been so misrepresented and my philosophies so distorted as characterized in this dialogue. Apparently, this base behavior depicts his notion that he has arrived and others are “yet afar off.”—*Buff Scott, Jr.*



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