

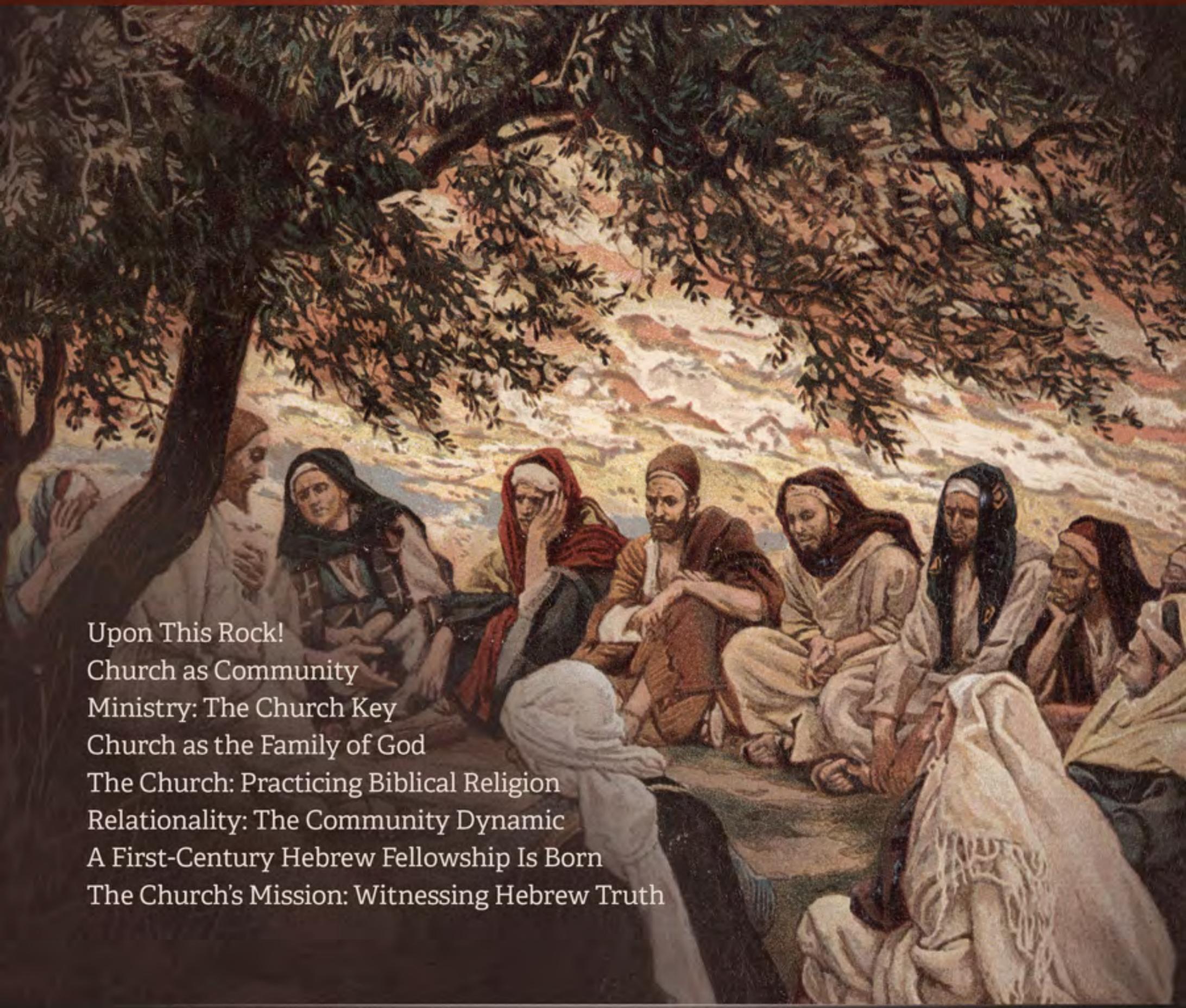


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*Church Dynamics Issue*

# RESTORE!

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Upon This Rock!  
Church as Community  
Ministry: The Church Key  
Church as the Family of God  
The Church: Practicing Biblical Religion  
Relationality: The Community Dynamic  
A First-Century Hebrew Fellowship Is Born  
The Church's Mission: Witnessing Hebrew Truth

*"Steadfast in the Apostles' Teaching, Fellowship, and Prayers" (Acts 2:42).*

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## RESTORE!

“The Lord is well pleased for his righteousness’ sake;  
 he will exalt the Torah and make it honorable.  
 But this people have been robbed . . . and no one says, *Restore!*”  
 (Isaiah 42:21–23).

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Hebraic Christian Global Community is an international, transdenominational, multiethnic teaching, publishing, and fellowship resource to the body of Christ. We promote the restoration of Christian unity, the recovery of the Hebraic foundations of Christian faith, and the renewal of Christian love and support for the international Jewish community and the nation of Israel.

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*Great blessing is God's solemn promise to everyone who blesses Abraham's children!*

## RESTORE!

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**SHOFAR  
SOUNDS**  
Thoughts from  
the Editor

# Hebraic Foundations of Christian Community

The Christian church has long suffered from an identity crisis. Since the time that it abandoned its connection with the Israelite nation and the Jewish religion, Christianity has been adrift in a maelstrom of shifting currents of tradition and raging winds of teaching. The church has lost its moorings.

Today, it bears little resemblance to the organism that Jesus and the apostles developed in the first century. The problem is simple: the church has lost its Jewish connection. For all intents and purposes, it has become a Gentile entity—Hellenized, Latinized, and largely paganized in both concept and structure.

The reason for so many diverse viewpoints on the nature and purpose of the church today is the original church's being transplanted from the rich soil of the land of the Bible into the barren clay of pagan lands. The pagan heart hates the God of the Bible, and it desperately screams, "Anything but the God of the Jews." Any human (or demonic, for that matter) tradition is preferable to the pure light of divine revelation that radiated forth in the Hebrew Scriptures, bringing healthy lives and relationships to the community of believers in the God of Israel.

The church has not escaped the diabolical challenge of human exaltation. Rather than follow in the simple God-focused faith of Jesus, it has adopted man-centered strategies that have been oppressive and often destructive to the fabric of both spiritual and secular societies. At times, the church has seemed to be a religio-political monstrosity, enslaving the hearts of humans to man-concocted doctrines and practices. So many people have been used and abused for so long that, in many instances, the church today is totally irrelevant to society at large and is increasingly becoming a

vacant anachronism in a world that is moving on.

At the same time, various movements have emerged that seek to repair the damage and make the church relevant again. These efforts have brought to the human scene a "touchy-feely," user-friendly Christianity that rarely challenges and more often than not condones human frailty and even depravity. Could God possibly have known what he was doing when he made demands on human conduct? Surely, if he had consulted with Christian psychologists he would have given "Ten Suggestions." After all, if God were only human, he'd understand!

What is the answer to this growing dilemma? When in doubt, consult the "Owner's Manual"! Go back to the Book. When we get there, to our amazement we find that God does understand because he did become human in the person of Jesus and that he still gives Ten Commandments and the grace to observe them! We also begin to understand that what has masqueraded for centuries as the church of Jesus Christ has actually been a pale shadow of the real thing, the ultimate example of what happens when men try to do it their way, not God's way.

We must go back in order to go forward out of this morass of human confusion. Like Abraham, we must leave Babylon and head for Bethel! And God is still giving the same call: "*Lech l'chab*" ("Go for yourself"). It's time for a restoration and renewal movement the likes of which the world has never seen. It's time to restore all things spoken by the prophets and to renew both the Spirit and the Word.

The church must be the ultimate objective of this renewal movement. The church must be restored to its biblical foundations. And, it's happening right before our eyes and around the world. Across denominational lines, international boundaries, and ethnic barriers, the biblical church is emerging. Most are moving in this direction intuitively by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not even understanding theologically what they are doing.

The church as community is emerging. The church that was born as a community at Sinai and was born again by the Spirit in the upper room is breaking forth from chains of human tradition to embrace the Hebraic foundations of the faith of Jesus and the apostles. The original models and methodologies that made both Israel and the church communities of witness and power are being employed to spark a revolution in Christian thinking.

History is in the making! David's fallen *sukkah* is being restored. The church is returning to the home as the locus for spiritual growth, and communities are emerging that unfold into congregations, the holy convocations of biblical proportions that bring the family of God together to celebrate the goodness and grace of the Most High. Where two or three are gathered together, the Messiah is present. God is at work in the world, and, once again, his creation is good and very good! 



**John D. Garr, Ph.D.**  
Founder and President

**In this issue, we focus on the true dynamics of the first-century church and how those principles should be applied to the church today in order to recover an authentic foundation for faith and practice.**



**Restore!** welcomes letters, faxes, and e-mail from all of our readers. This page is dedicated to sharing as many of your comments, criticisms, and questions as possible.

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 I must say that I have really enjoyed *Restore!* magazine. The issue on Esther and Purim and how you put it together who Haman represents was so powerful. God's plan to bless humanity, the three families of Abraham (including Ishmael, these were powerful messages. Thank you so much for your faithfulness to the vision.  
 Andrina Hall  
 Fresno, CA

 I have been studying and practicing the faith of Yeshua for some eleven years now, and *Restore!* magazine has helped me understand so much about my faith that I would not have known or discovered otherwise. So, *today rabbah* for all the information. May Yeshua bless your ministry abundantly.  
 Jackie Moorehead  
 Swan Quarter, NC

 Shalom, grace, and mercy be upon all of you in Yahweh's name! Thank you so much for the materials that you produce that are helping our Messianic Community here in C. T. Terrell prison unit. As coordinator of our community, I am happy to report that we are growing spiritually. We would appreciate any books, CDs, and other materials that you could send us to help us as we seek to understand the Messiah better through the Hebrew roots of our faith.  
 Terry Nash  
 Rosharon, TX

 I recently came across Dr. John D. Garr's book *Living Emblems*, and I found it fascinating. I also receive *Restore!* magazine regularly and must say that it is a great strength and blessing to me. Please continue the good work that you are doing in Jesus' name.  
 Carl Lanier  
 Salem, OR

 I read *Our Lost Legacy* in 2012, and it revolutionized my life with the amazing truths about the Jewish roots of my Christian faith. I read and reread all of the materials from Hebraic Christian Global Community that I receive, and each time I receive new insight from the Word of God. Thank you for this great ministry.  
 Edgar Ramirez  
 Shafter, CA

 Here at New Hampshire State Prison, your magazine has been an incredible blessing for me and has spilled into the lives of other men. Your copy editor Judy Grehan has written me encouraging letters challenging me to study God's Word with diligence. I have also been blessed by Dr. Garr's *Christian Fruit: Jewish Root* which has helped immerse me in my new life of following Messiah Yeshua. Thank you so much!  
 Alexander Papastephanou  
 Derry, NH

 My wife and I love the insight and Spirit-filled teachings in *Restore!* May *Adonai* keep his hands of peace upon you, Dr. Garr.  
 Shaun Daugherty  
 Comstock, NY

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# Upon This Rock!

## RESTORING THE CHURCH TO ITS BIBLICALLY HEBRAIC FOUNDATIONS

BY JOHN D. GARR, PH.D.

When Jesus asked his disciples who they understood him to be, Peter's effusive answer encapsulated the most profound truth in Holy Scripture. "You are he, the Messiah, Son of the living God!" the impetuous apostle exclaimed. Realizing that the ultimate truth about his very nature had been revealed by the heavenly Father, Jesus replied, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:16, 18).

Many have taken this statement to mean that Jesus' mission on earth was to clean the religious slate and initiate something that had never been considered in the history of humanity—the church. Jesus was finally terminating and entombing a lifeless, failed religion and announcing the birth of a vibrant, new faith, they say.

In order to understand what Jesus said and did, however, we must return these words to their context, to Second-Temple Judaism, to the life and practices of first-century Israeli Jewry. We cannot understand these words if we transplant them into Gentile soil, for they were spoken by a Jew in the land

of the Jews to no one but Jews. Only when we return to this place, this people, and this time can we truly comprehend the meaning and function of the church.

### THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The term *church* is both very familiar and very misunderstood, generally at the same time. What is the church, who is a part of it, when did it begin, how does it operate, where does it exist, and why does it exist? These are the questions of ecclesiology, the study of the church. Does the church make Christians or do Christians make the church? Is the church merely a local congregation of believers? Is it a denomination? Is it the entire Christian community? Anyone who has interacted to any degree with believers of various communions knows that the answers to these questions are many and widely divergent.

In a theological analysis, it is essential that we stress the biblicality of the church—both the term, its definition, and its function. We must turn to the Bible for our understanding of ecclesiology. In analyzing Holy Scripture, however, we must also be careful that we engage in exegesis, not eisegesis. The use of the latter has resulted in the maze of confusion on the subject that now exists, for men of good intentions have read into the texts of Scripture the meanings which their culture, politics, or other environmental conditioning dictated. We must exegete the term *church* by literally "drawing out" the meaning of the words and texts of Scripture.

### THE CHURCH, ETYMOLOGICALLY SPEAKING

The word *church* is derived from the Greek word κυριακός (*kuriakos*) which means "belonging to the Lord." The word *church* must be understood, however, in the light of the New Testament Greek term



ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*), which refers to an assembly or gathering of people. In classical Greek the word ἐκκλησία meant an assembly of the citizens of a city, with the understanding that those who were of this assembly had the right to vote on civic issues.

*Ekklesia* is derived from the verb ἐκκαλέω, (*ekkaleo*) which means “to summon forth.” Hence, it has been said to mean “the called out.” The full import of this meaning cannot be deduced from the Greek word ἐκκλησία alone. For an understanding of the word *church*, we must go behind the Greek text of the New Testament and return to the Hebrew in which the words of the apostles were either written or thought. In essence, we must return to the Hebrew foundations of Christian faith in order to arrive at a proper definition of the one word that most often denominates the community of believers in Jesus.

We begin to discover the spiritual meaning of the secular Greek word ἐκκλησία when we turn to the Hebrew words which were rendered ἐκκλησία by the translators of the Septuagint version of the Old Testament. Seventy scholars in Alexandria translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in the third century B.C. to make it possible for the Hellenized Jews of the Diaspora to read the Scriptures in the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean Basin. These scholars used the Greek word ἐκκλησία to translate the Hebrew word קהל (*kahal*) which means, “congregation, assembly.” The word קהל (the same root as קהל with different vowel pointing) means to “call together” or to “assemble people” when used in the hiphil. Both words are derivatives of the word for voice קול (*kol*) and ultimately refer to the summoning of an assembly or to the act of assembling. This term is generally used biblically to refer to the congregation of the people of Israel, e.g., קהל ישראל (*kahal Yisrael*—congregation of Israel); קהל יהוה (*kahal Yahweh*—congregation of Yahweh); and קהל האלהים (*kahal haElohim*—congregation of God). It often denotes the general assembly of the people—men, women, and children. The Jewish people are sometimes referred to as the *kehillah*, from this same root. The word קהל is usually rendered ἐκκλησία in the Septuagint. The implication of the word קהל is that of congregation in the context of community.

A second Hebrew word that is translated “congregation” is עדת (*edah*), which refers to the collective people who are gathered, particularly at the tent of meeting. Some have suggested that, since the term is first used in Exodus 12:3, it indicates that the “congregation” or church of Israel came into being with the command (call) to celebrate Passover and leave Egypt. This word points to the congregation (community) as centered in the cult (corporate worship) or the law. The term *edah* means “the unambiguous and permanent term for the ceremonial community as a whole.” On the other hand, *kahal* is the ceremonial expression for the assembly that is called. In the New

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Testament Greek, *ekklesia* is generally used to translate *kahal*; however, it is never used to translate *edah*, which is usually rendered συναγωγή (*synagoge*).

The word עדת (*edah*) also means “witness.” This clearly points out the fact that the assembly of God’s “church” has always focused in the public witness to God himself and to his truth. This has been true of the people of Israel since Sinai: whenever they assembled as the *edah*, they have publicly proclaimed, “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.” It has also been true of the Christian assembly that has made its declaration of faith an integral part of its liturgy. The *kahal* (community) gathers as the *edah* (congregation-assembly) to bear collective witness to God’s truth. The *ekklesia* (community) gathers as the *synagoge* (congregation—assembly) to bear collective witness to God’s truth. The functions of the church in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the Apostolic Scriptures are precisely the same, even in the Hebrew and Greek terms used to designate the community.

In biblical language, then, the church is the assembly of those who are called out (summoned) to be in covenant with God as his community for the express purpose of being his witness in the world. The word *church* is not exclusively a New Testament term, for the origin of the term is found in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament which the writers of the New Testament used. The word which the apostles chose to use as an expression of their corporate identity was the same as that which had been used by the Jewish people since the Exodus. This is why Stephen calls Israel “the *church* in the wilderness” in Acts 7:38 and why Hebrews 2:12 quotes Psalm 22:22, which says, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of *the congregation* will I praise thee,” as say-

**We cannot understand the words of Jesus if we transplant them into Gentile soil, for they were spoken by a Jew in the land of the Jews to no one but Jews.**

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**The church was modeled after both the temple and the synagogue which were so intrinsically involved in the lives of the first-century Jews.**

ing, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the *church* will I sing praise unto thee” (KJV). This is also why Hebrews 12:23 uses “*general assembly*” and “*church* of the firstborn” as virtually synonymous.

The New Testament writers understood that the Greek word ἐκκλησία (*ekklelesia*) translated their Hebrew word קהלה (*kehal*) and meant the community or congregation of God, just as the Greek word συναγωγή (*synagoge*) translated their Hebrew word עדת (*edah*) and meant congregation or assembly. For Jesus and the apostles, there was absolute continuity between the congregation under the old covenant and the congregation under the new covenant, the church in the Old Testament and the church in the New Testament. Jesus did nothing new, therefore, when he called unto him whom he would and ordained twelve apostles to be the foundation of his reformed congregation or community (Mark 3:13–14; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 2:19–20). He was restoring Judaism to its original purpose and reforming it by introducing a new covenant sealed in his own blood.

The term *church*, then, might more accurately be translated *community* or *congregation*. Perhaps if the instructions of King James to the interpreters of the Bishops’ Bible, which came to be known as the Authorized Version (King James Version) of the Scriptures, had not proscribed the use of either the word *community* or the word *congregation* instead of the ecclesiastical term *church*, generations of Christians in English-speaking nations would have understood the church to be the community or congregation of God, a perpetuation of and in complete continuity with the congregation of Israel. Then, we might have more readily understood Paul’s olive tree meta-

phor in Romans 11 as revealing Israel, into which Gentile branches were grafted to share in the spiritual root and fatness of biblical Judaism. We could also have understood the church as continuation, not replacement, of Israel and the new covenant as the renewed covenant that Hebrews 8:10–11 clearly reveals.

**WHO ARE THE CONGREGATION?**

The question that begs to be asked is this: who are the people who comprise the assembly of those who are called out to be in covenant with God? The answer is clear in the Old Testament: it was the entire assembly of the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob who made the exodus from Egypt and appeared before the Lord at Sinai, and it was all of their subsequent posterity. While all of Israel was denominated and arranged accordingly around the tent of meeting in the Sinai desert, they were collectively considered *edah*, the “congregation of God.” While there were various elections within Israel, as Jacob noted in Genesis 49, all of Israel was the *kehal*, the ones called out to enter into covenant with Yahweh. All of Israel, therefore, was the *church* in the wilderness.

The answer is equally clear in the New Testament. Just as the Old Testament church was “baptized into one body unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Corinthians 10:2), so all believers have been baptized by one Spirit into one body (1 Corinthians 12:13), buried with Christ in baptism (Colossians 2:12). This includes everyone who has been “called out”: “There is *one* body, and one Spirit, even as ye are *called* in one hope of your calling” (Ephesians 4:4). It is a calling into covenant with God: “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead” (Romans 7:4). All believers are the children of God who have been “espoused to one husband” (2 Corinthians 11:2). Though there are diversities of callings and administrations in the community of Christ, the church is one—those who have been called out from the world to come before Mount Calvary and receive the impartation of God’s grace in the person of Jesus Christ and to enter into relationship with God through the new covenant. The unity of all believers in the universal church does not limit the elections of God for specific functions within the church; however, it does require that all of those elections operate in mutual respect for and submission to one another and that they maintain their ongoing interaction with one another as members of the one body of Christ.

It should be noted that the church is not merely the sum of all the local entities comprised of Christian believers. In virtually every instance of the use of the word *ekklelesia* in the New Testament, it refers to a local body of believers. Generally, this was the case with all believers in a city (Acts 5:11; 8:1; 11:22; 12:1,

5; 13:1); however, it also denotes house churches or congregations meeting in homes (Romans 16:5; Colossians 4:15). In two cases it refers to all believers in a larger geographical area (Acts 9:31; 1 Corinthians 16:19). In every case, however, a single group of believers is never considered as a mere part of the whole church. The fullness of the church is found in each of its localized manifestations.

### “NO NEW THING UNDER THE SUN”

Most Christian scholars conclude that the church was born on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. And, they are right, but in the wrong century! The church was not born on Pentecost at Mount Zion in Acts 2. It was born on Pentecost at Mount Sinai in Exodus 20. The church was *born again* on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2!

The truth is that Jesus’ “I will build my church” statement meant, “I will restore my community.” James declared this to be Jesus’ work: “After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up” (Acts 15:16). Jesus was a restorer, not an innovator (Hebrews 8:9–10). He never intended to destroy what God had been molding among the Jewish people for centuries so that he could start something totally different and completely new. He sought only to restore the house (congregation) of David that lay in ruin.

### FROM TEMPLE AND SYNAGOGUE

The church of Jesus Christ was modeled after both the temple and the synagogue that were so intrinsically involved in the lives of first century Jews. The church came to be thought of as the spiritual temple, the new habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:21–22). Local assemblies of the church were still termed synagogues by James thirty years after the resurrection of Jesus (James 2:2). Translators have concealed an important truth that this verse in James’ epistle should have revealed to all believers. Almost universally, they have rendered the word συναγωγή (*synagoge*) in this passage in James’ epistle as “assembly” or “gathering” rather than as “synagogue.” At the same time, they have had no difficulty translating συναγωγή as “synagogue of Satan” in Revelation 2:9; 3:9 and “synagogue of the Jews” in Acts 17:10! This inconsistency in translation has relegated the term *synagoge* to the Jews and Satan while reserving the sanitized *meeting* or *assembly* for congregations of the church.

The truth is that, at least three decades after the resurrection of Jesus, congregations of the “twelve tribes scattered abroad” were denominated as “synagogues.” Indeed, the ongoing life of the church was patterned after the synagogue. Its officers were merely an extension of the form with which the apostles had been

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familiar all their lives. Each congregation of the church was autonomous, like the synagogues before them. The leader of each assembly was called president (*nasi*), rather than pastor, until at least the middle of the second century. The government of the early church was purely egalitarian, both in the democracy of the local congregation and in the *yeshiva* or *Beit Din* of its translocal leadership (Acts 15).

The liturgy of the earliest church paralleled the liturgy of the synagogue. Forms of prayer and praise remained consistent with the patterns of the Judaism in which Jesus and the apostles had expressed their faith. Jesus was not seeking to establish a new order; he merely brought a new covenant to God’s ancient system of praise, worship, and service—biblical Judaism.

### BACK TO BASICS

It is time that the church stopped wasting millions of dollars on spectacular single-purpose structures and on entertaining stage productions. These monies can more effectively be spent on personnel to nurture the body of Messiah in communities patterned after the first century church. God’s command to Moses is good advice to us: “See that you make all things according to the patterns shown you in the mount.” In this case, the Mount Zion community of the first century must be the pattern from which we contextualize the faith of the apostles in today’s multicultural world society. When we do, we will find ourselves building on the Rock, not on the sands of human tradition, and the lives that we build and bring to maturity will stand for all time. 

Dr. John D. Garr, founder and president of the Hebraic Christian Global Community, has pioneered research, writing, and teaching on the Hebraic foundations of the Christian faith for more than forty years, helping believers understand the theological emergence of Christianity from the matrix of biblical Judaism. John’s wife Pat and their sons, John, Timothy, and Stephen, share in advancing the widespread work of Hebraic Christian Global Community.



**The Mount Zion community of the first century must be the pattern for today’s church.**

# Church as Community

## *LESSONS FROM JUDAISM FOR TODAY'S CHURCH*

BY MARVIN R. WILSON, PH.D.

**T**he current display of rugged individualism and private Christianity seen within the church must give way to a greater emphasis on the corporate life of the community of faith. The makeup or sociological

structure of the church has been the subject of debate for centuries. One of the earliest movements in Christianity was monasticism, a term that comes from the Greek verb *monazein*, meaning “to be alone,” “to live in solitude.” Monasticism

stressed seclusion from the world and society by withdrawal into a private life of faith. There have been and there still are many different expressions of independent, separatistic Christianity. At the same time, the Roman Catholic Church has for years held before the world the concept of the Church as an indispensable community of which each individual Christian must be a member. Historical testimony to this fact is borne out by the teaching of the Catholic Church that *extra ecclesiam null salus*, “outside the church there is no salvation.”

From this brief introduction, several questions surface immediately. What is the church? How are we to



understand the relation between the individual and the community? Is there a model which emerges from our Hebraic heritage that may be useful as a pattern for correcting the imbalance evident in ecclesiastical circles today?

### INDEPENDENT CHRISTIANS

Unhappily, one of the characteristics of contemporary Protestant Christianity is the emphasis on what might be called “Lone Ranger” Christianity. That is, people seem to be losing their biblical sense of accountability to each other and think that they can, for the most part, operate on their own. This dominant and sometimes rather blatant Protestant emphasis on individualism in piety and life has rightly been described as callousness.<sup>1</sup> At the present time we may observe an assorted array of dominating and independent church leaders who, through pious language and intimidation impose their will upon the group. These authority figures frequently punctuate their conversation with such phrases as “the Lord told me” or “God revealed to me” or “the Lord spoke to me and said . . .” And we need not limit our examples to cultic situations like Jonestown.

The community-centered focus of the church as described in Scripture is now in danger of being replaced by the rugged individualism of a private kind of faith. The church is responsible for bringing this danger upon itself. Let us think for a moment: Could it be that we have so stressed the freedom of conscience before God, the individual priesthood of the believer, the importance of personal devotions, the right of each person to interpret the Bible privately, the priority of private confession of sin directly to God, and the encouragement of independent churches and separatistic, autonomous parachurch agencies—could it be we have so stressed these things that we have come to believe that we can function, not only in these but also in other areas, as self-sufficient believers?

This issue was put in clear perspective by the Catholic priest who once was asked by a reporter of religious news if he could briefly delineate the major difference between Protestantism and Catholicism. “That’s easy,” the priest replied, “The Protestant Church says to people, ‘The Church needs you,’ but the Catholic Church says, ‘You need the church.’” Though such a reply obviously paints an overly simplistic picture of both Catholicism and Protestantism, what this priest said is in large measure true—namely, that the church must be more than an *ad hoc* scramble of independent individualists, each going his own way. The individual can never survive apart from the group. Human beings were created to be social, and God has constituted his people to func-

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tion within a body. A person’s true meaning derives from relationships with God and with other human beings (Mark 12:28–34).

### A CORPORATE PERSONALITY

Since Bible times, Jews have generally embodied this concept in an exemplary way. God chose a people (Deuteronomy 7:7), and, accordingly, the Jewish religion is characterized by peoplehood. Whereas Christians often define their faith primarily as a system of beliefs, Jews see doctrine or belief as only one and not the most important of several elements constituting the essence of Judaism. In the words of the Jewish scholar Nicholas De Lange, “To be a Jew means first and foremost to belong to a group, the Jewish people, and the religious beliefs are secondary, in a sense, to this corporate allegiance.”<sup>2</sup> This deeply rooted biblical emphasis upon folk—that is, the group—is underscored by the fact that most Jewish prayer employs the plural “we,” not the singular “I.” Prayer expresses the “cry of the whole community.”<sup>3</sup> One of the best-known biblical prayers expresses this communal factor in its opening words: “Our Father in heaven” (Matthew 6:9). In the words of an old Hasidic saying, “A prayer which is not spoken in the name of all Israel is no prayer at all.”<sup>4</sup>

Central to the Hebraic concept of community is the idea of corporate personality.<sup>5</sup> This concept means that the individual was always thought of in the collective (family, tribe, nation) and the collective in the individual. This corporate solidarity<sup>6</sup> was reinforced by the fact that the entire community (past ancestors and future members) was viewed as

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one personality, "a living whole, a single animated mass of blood, flesh, and bones."<sup>7</sup> God's covenant was made not only with those physically present in the wilderness but also with future generations, "those who are not here today" (Deuteronomy 29:15).

That the Hebrew language is full of what we refer to in English as "collectives" gives additional undergirding to this organic solidarity.<sup>8</sup> For instance, in the Hebrew Bible the word *adam* may refer to man as an individual or to mankind in the collective sense. All Israelites are mutually accountable for one another, and they participate mutually in the life of one another. A striking example of this interrelatedness is the ancient biblical practice of blood revenge.<sup>9</sup>

In the modern Jewish community, each Jew at Passover is obligated to regard himself as if he personally—not simply his ancestors—had come out of Egypt. In addition, each Jew is taught to think of himself as personally standing at Mount Sinai in order to receive the Torah. Thus the Law is given to every Jew, not simply to one Jew, Moses.<sup>10</sup> In a similar way, the concept of the sacredness of human life is basic to the idea of corporate personality. In the Mishnah we read, "He who destroys a single life is considered as if he had destroyed the whole world, and he who saves a single life is considered as having saved the whole world" (*Sanhedrin* 4:5).

World Jewry has long been a model of community. The Hebrew word *mishpahah* means "family." But *mishpahah* refers not only to parents and children; it is a whole social unit that includes uncles, aunts, and even remote cousins. Furthermore, each *mishpahah* sees itself as part of a single worldwide Jewish family.

***A body of Christian believers is only as strong as the sum of its individual members, for the church, like Israel, functions as a corporate personality.***

Thus it is clear why the concept of family solidarity has been one of the chief reasons behind the stability and survival of the Jewish community over the centuries.

Jewish people also customarily refer to themselves as *am* ("a people"), *haburah* ("community"), and *qehailah* ("congregation, assembly").

These terms emphasize togetherness and accountability. Synagogue membership is never figured on an individual basis but rather according to the number of family units. Furthermore, even the poorest Jew in a community is not exempt from giving to charity; he still has communal accountability.

From time immemorial Jews have also taken seriously the biblical teaching that everyone is his brother's keeper (cf. Genesis 4:9). Thus each senses a responsibility for his neighbor's shortcoming and needs. Indeed, no one lives in total isolation from his neighbor. A dramatic story illustrative of this point has been passed down from Talmudic times. The tale is about three men in a boat. Suddenly, one of the men begins to drill a hole beneath his seat. When his friends immediately plead with him to stop, he replies, "What are you worrying about? I'm only drilling under my seat." The moral drawn by the rabbis has been repeated again and again, "We're *all* in the same boat."<sup>11</sup>

## THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

How does the above concept of corporate personality in Hebrew thought apply to the life of the church? First, the New Testament teaches that when one comes to saving faith, one is incorporated into Christ so as to eat his flesh (John 6:35, 54), to be baptized into him (Romans 6:3), and to exist in him as a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17).<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, as a visible body of believers, the church is spiritually grafted into the family of Abraham (Romans 4:11, 16; Galatians 3:26–29). "There is no mere individualistic experience for Christians, but a corporate one."<sup>13</sup> In Paul's words, "We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Thus the Pauline idea of the church as a body is firmly rooted in the Old Testament concept of corporate personality. Accordingly, for Paul, as in the Israelite community of old, the individual incorporates in himself the group and illustrates in his person and life the ideals that the group professes, making its identity his own. But at the same time, the group derives its life and its distinct identity from the individual.<sup>14</sup>

In effect, the church is a community of faith, learning, and living, just as the synagogue serves as a house of worship, study, and assembly. Thus a Christian's actions within that fellowship are not

solely a private matter. When one member suffers, the whole body shares the grief. When one rejoices, all share in that joy (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:26). A body of Christian believers is only as strong as the sum of its individual members, for the church, like Israel, functions as a corporate personality. The lives of its members are intertwined and find their truest meaning in a network of relationships within this body. As a Jewish sage once observed, “There is no room for God in him who is full of himself.”<sup>15</sup> In the Bible, piety is always oriented toward community. Like Israel of old, the church is called “the people of God” (1 Peter 2:10), and is expected to function with communal self-awareness.

Whenever the church has forsaken this aspect of its Jewish roots—the so-called democracy of the synagogue—and become authoritarian or hierarchically centered, rather than lay—or people—centered, its social consciousness has been greatly blunted.<sup>16</sup> In Christianity, God and one’s neighbor belong inseparably together. The church must never become so self-centered and self-sufficient that it fails to grasp this fact, for the concept of the priesthood of the believer means that each Christian functions as a priest not only unto God but also unto his neighbor.

In ancient as well as modern synagogues, when the congregation completed the reading of one of the books of Moses, the entire congregation exclaimed loudly, *hazaq, hazaq ve-nithazeq*. “(Be strong, be strong, and let us strengthen one another!).” It is with this same sense of mutual dependence that today’s church must learn to stand in the full strength of its Hebrew heritage. 

**(This article is excerpted from *Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*.)**

<sup>1</sup> W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), p. 388.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas De Lange, *Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> David de Sola Pool, *Why I Am a Jew* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 93.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Buber, ed., *Ten Rungs: Hasidic Sayings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1947), p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> See H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 25–44.

<sup>6</sup> For a more recent discussion of corporeality in Judaism, see Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1983). Wyschogrod holds that the Jewish people is the dwelling place of God in the world. He stresses that while the Christian idea of God incarnate in the Jew Jesus concentrates all incarnation in one Jew, Judaism holds to a far more diffuse indwelling of God in the whole people of Israel.

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<sup>7</sup> Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, p. 28. The quotation is from W. Robertson Smith, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites*, 2nd ed. (London: A. & C. Black, 1984), pp. 273–74.

<sup>8</sup> See Thorleif Bowman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. Jules L. Moreau (repr. W. W. Norton & Co., 1970), p. 70.

<sup>9</sup> See Albert Gelin, *The Key Concepts of the Old Testament*, trans. George Lamb (New York: Paulist Press, 1963), p. 64.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Umen, *Jewish Concepts and Reflections* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> See Morris N. Kertzer, *What Is a Jew?* (New York: Collier Books, 1961), p. 39.

<sup>12</sup> E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1978), p. 66.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Pauline Theology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> John McKenzie, “The Significance of the Old Testament for Christian Faith in Roman Catholicism,” in *The Old Testament and the Christian Faith*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson (repr. New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), p. 113.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Buber, *Ten Rungs*, p. 102.

<sup>16</sup> Davies, *The Gospel and the Land*, pp. 384–87.

**The Pauline idea of the church as a body is firmly rooted in the Old Testament concept of corporate personality.**

Dr. Marvin R. Wilson served for decades as Professor of Biblical and Theological Studies at Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts. He is internationally acclaimed as one of the world’s foremost authorities on Christianity’s Jewish roots and on fostering dialogue and relationships between Christians and the Jewish community. His book *Our Father Abraham* is a classic study Marvin and his wife Polly live in S. Hamilton, MA.



# Ministry: The Church Key

## *SUCCESS FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM CHURCH*

BY KARL D. COKE, PH.D.

**T**oday's churches compete against one another for members. Too often, their competition is done through marketing. For example, if one congregation has a "family-life center" and advertises its existence,

then members of other congregations without "family-life centers" are sure to choose the one with the center. These competitive congregations have found that marketing produces increased numbers. The increase in numbers seems to be the only measure legitimizing the use of marketing as a tool for growth.

Oddly, after looking beneath the surface of the reason given for marketing, increased numerical growth does not seem to be its primary reason. While increased numbers do give bragging rights to carnal congregations, their purpose in gaining new members is an automatic revenue increase—the real reason behind all marketing. Alas, these congregations are just following a worldly procedure. Since increased revenue is the only reason for competition in the commercial world, by following the world's marketing plan, are competitive religious groups identifying their true god as mammon?

### **THE TRAGEDIES OF COMPETITION**

When churches enter this competition, they actually enter into competition with themselves. With-



out realizing it, these competitors wage war against each other over potential members and fail to prosecute the real war against their true enemy—Satan. Competitive congregations are only eager for what brings instant self-gratification. They seek increased numbers without ever identifying their own unique biblical purpose. They seem to be anesthetized against “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:12).

It seems obvious that Satan would encourage congregations to fight each other rather than himself. That aside, there are **two major problems** created by congregational competition—**division** and **contention**. A cursory look at today’s churches reveals both division and contention. While division and contention may not be the only by-products of competition, they are abundantly evident. Not only evident, competition between congregations is not new. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:10–13, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no **divisions** among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are **contentions** among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided?”

Shamefully, competition between congregations is so popular that it is being written about in the secular press. Rabbi Gerald L. Zelitzer of Neve Shalom Congregation, located in Metuchen-Edison, New Jersey, wrote an article “praising” competition for *USA Today* (September 28, 1999). His title was “Religions Use Retail Marketing to Compete for Converts.” His tragic conclusion was, “Competition between faiths, as long as it is not coercive or done in an unethical or distasteful manner, can only serve to better **the religious product** of all as they rival one another in **the sacred marketplace.**” Like many rabbis and ministers, Zelitzer errs “not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). If he did, he could never call “preaching good tidings,” “binding up the brokenhearted,” “proclaiming liberty to captives,” or “opening prisons for those bound” (Isaiah 61:1) “**the religious product.**” Neither could he call the potentially eternally lost “**the sacred marketplace.**”

#### **GOD’S IS WITH THOSE WHO SEEK HIM**

“Competition between faiths” should not exist, let alone be done “coercively,” “unethically,” or “distastefully.” “Ethical religious competition”

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is both an oxymoron and blasphemous. God can and does bless many congregations with numerical growth. God points out what causes growth in 2 Chronicles 15:9, Acts 2:41, and Acts 4:4. In each situation the growth was fast and numerous. But God didn’t need Madison Avenue to attract members. Nay, as he said to Zerubbabel, “Not by might nor by power, but by my spirit saith the LORD of hosts.” The reason given for the growth mentioned in 2 Chronicles 15:9 is that others “saw that the LORD his God was with him.” God was with him (Judah) because most of Judah (and Benjamin) had entered a covenant (verse 12) to seek the LORD with all their heart. It is interesting that in verse 13 the death penalty was invoked upon those who would not “seek” God. This appears to be the same penalty currently upon today’s non-God-seeking congregations.

God is with those who seek him (2 Chronicles 15:2). This point is critical to those interested in growth. All those pursuing growth via competition should remember that the word *competition*, by definition, produces one winner and many losers. The problem with those who win is that they often have an exaggerated sense of superiority. Conversely, losers acquire a sense of failure or inferiority. Members within both congregations then get a false sense of God’s approval. Those who grow tend to believe they have God’s approval while those who do not grow conclude

**God’s Presence  
is the only pure  
cause of growth.  
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present, feelings  
of superiority  
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will disappear,  
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once again  
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is what makes “religious marketing” so successful. Markets are driven by demand. What people ask for is exactly what stores put on the shelf and advertise. Since most believers are seeking “self-realization” fellowships, that is what religious marketers produce. Western religious people are trying desperately to “actualize” themselves (make themselves god). They want to bring situations under their own power. Most are seeking this end through material wealth. They are wanting money and its power in order to be their own master. People flock to congregations that advertise this kind of empowerment. Unfortunately, like pyramid sales schemes, this kind of power belongs only to those at the top. Self-empowerment can be nothing more than idolatry. Remember, making one’s self into an idol and telling God what and how to do things does not work. In the end, this demagoguery reveals one as greedy and lustful. This kind of god can never satisfy the real human need and takes one away from the covenant to seek God. “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul” (Jesus: Mark 8:36)?

**LESSONS FROM GOD’S INSTRUCTIONS TO ISRAEL**

Have we forgotten the words of God to Israel as they were about to enter the Promised Land? God said, “Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Deuteronomy 8:11-14). God showed himself superior to all the gods of Egypt through the plagues and delivering his people out of bondage. Why did they so quickly turn back to an Egyptian god—the golden calf? Also, why do modern congregations chose idolatry over a relationship with the living God? The answer is simple. Most people want a god they can control. Jehovah is not such a God. He controls man. This is why man chooses idolatry. Idolatry offers man the opportunity to control his god. The creator of any god has power over it.

**DOCTRINAL CONTROLS**

It should be noted that idolatry flourishes in congregations which only require common beliefs. Western congregations are designed around common beliefs. This is what allows competitive marketing to exist. These congre-

God does not approve of them. This causes members to move continually from one congregation to the next thinking they will discover God’s approval at the “church of what’s happening now.” Why? They are victims of marketing.

Moving to a new congregation, however, is often disappointing. Reality eventually sets in at the new congregation chosen because of competitive marketing techniques. At the large new, “successful” congregation, there is little personal contact with the leader. This is explained away by more marketing which explains how “busy” the leader is. Next, the new “market-acquired” member finds opportunity to minister is rarely afforded to newcomers. However, these people stay at the “marketing” congregation because pride locks them in. Going back to an original congregation is never considered because that would be an admission of being wrong.

Eventually, “buyer’s remorse” sets in (similar to having impulsively purchased an item due to slick advertising), and market-driven congregations fill with back-row members without identity or ministry.

Saints need to realize that what Rabbi Zelitzer calls “*the religious product*” is, in reality, idolatry. Sadly, immature believers are only seeking “the religious product.” They are not seeking God himself. This

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gations do not require “doing” the Word of God. They only require that you believe in “immersion,” “sprinkling,” “gifts,” or the like. In fact, many will disfellowship any member who challenges the resident belief system. In the West, what you believe is more important than what you do. In most of today’s congregations the school of Hillel has given way to the school of Shammai. Hillel taught that when you read God’s Word you should do what it says. Shammai taught that it was enough to just believe God’s Word. Hillel’s grandson, Gamaliel, said in Acts 5:38–39, “For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.” Is it possible to return to the teachings of Hillel, Gamaliel, or Paul?

### RETURN TO THE TRUSTWORTHY ANCIENT PATHS

In my opinion, it is time to follow the advice of Jeremiah (6:16), “This is what the LORD says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it.’” To say that the Western church and synagogue are at crossroads is a mild understatement. Both are in rapid decline. But, instead of seeking any method to provide growth, why not seek God’s path? It is time to enter into a covenant to seek God with all our hearts. It is not the time to install competitive marketing as a replacement for the moving of God’s Spirit. When the world sees that God is with his people, they will come in large numbers. God’s Presence is the only pure cause of growth. With God present, all congregations, whether large or small, will have his approval. With God present, feelings of superiority and inferiority will disappear and the focus will once again return to what constitutes a godly congregation.

The church should return to Acts 2:41–42 to find God’s pattern of activity for all local congregations. If they will focus on these activities, competitive marketing will not be necessary. God’s people should not be like Adam who tried to cover a spiritual problem with a carnal solution (fig leaf). Begin today asking this question about your congregation: “Does it offer religion or spirituality?” Regardless of size, every congregation should offer spirituality, not religion. Consider Acts 2:41–42 as a trustworthy ancient path to stimulate congregational growth. It worked for Jewish believers of the first century and continues to work today.

### THE ACTS 2:41–42 METHODOLOGY

1. They repented and were saved. **Teshuvah:** “Great is repentance, for it reaches up to the divine Throne

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of Glory” (Yoma 86a).

2. They were baptized. **Mikveh:** “Now ‘uncleanness’ is not mud or filth which water can remove, but is a matter of *scriptural decree and dependent upon the intention of the heart*” (Maimonides).

3. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching. **Yeshivah:** “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, *for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true*” (Luke–Acts 17:11).

4. They devoted themselves to fellowship. **Hithchabruth:** “*Properly to bind together, to bring into fellowship*” (Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon, p. 258).

5. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. **Bircath haMazon:** “*When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you*” (Moses, Deuteronomy 8:10).

6. They devoted themselves to prayer. **Kavanah:** “*True kavanah implies freedom from all strange thoughts, and complete awareness of the fact that one stands before the Divine Presence*” (Yad. Tefillah 4:15, 16).

Dr. Karl D. Coke is a Hebrew teacher whose understanding of the original languages, history, geography and cultures of Holy Scripture enables him to make the Bible come alive for his audiences and readers. As Chancellor of the Timothy Program International, he offers the world a high quality, accredited Bible college curriculum. Karl travels extensively and teaches internationally. He and his wife, Lori, live in Charlotte, North Carolina



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**Kavanah**  
**(Acts 2:41-42)**

# Church as the Family of God

## DISCOVERING CHURCH DYNAMICS IN THE INSTITUTION OF FAMILY

BY TERRIL D. LITRELL, PH.D.

**T**he church is of God and shall endure for time and eternity. The church is not a human institution, but a divine organism which is essential to God's plan of redemption for humanity. Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

The church refers to a visible group of people that can be located and observed, as in Acts 13:1, Romans 16:5, and Ephesians 1:1. It consists of all people throughout the world who have accepted Christ as their redeemer, even though some of them may not yet belong to a visible structure of community that has been called "church." God knows those who are his children (2 Timothy 2:19). This group is defined in the Holy Scriptures as the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Timothy 3:15). All truth that

was revealed to the holy patriarchs, prophets, sages, apostles, and teachers of the ages past is deposited in the church.

### THE FAMILY IN HEAVEN AND EARTH

The definition that Paul gives for the church in its entirety is, "The whole family in heaven and earth" (Ephesians 3:14–15). The church is a society founded upon natural affinity—a family. This family is not just a combination, but a community. The family of God, the "whole family," is not composed of those who *call* each other "brother" or "sister." They *are* brothers and sisters because they have the same father and mother. God is their Father, and Jerusalem above is their mother (Galatians 4:26). They are brothers and sisters in Christ. And, they do not have to be identical twins to be brothers and sisters!

The church is not composed of an elite group that selects its associates from a certain social class or ethnic group. The church is always inclusive of race, sex, class, ethnicity, and culture. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for we are all members of the one universal family of God (Galatians 3:27–28). The truth is that God is no respecter of persons. Every nation that fears him and receives his righteousness in Jesus Christ is accepted by God. The artificial wall of separation has been broken down between Jews and Gentiles, and we are all reconciled to God in one family (Acts 10:34–35; Ephesians 2:14–16).

### A COMMON FATHER

All the members of the church have a common father, Yahweh. He is not partial to just one of his children, loving only one, the eldest



son, the Jew. He also loves the younger son, the Gentile, the outcast prodigal who wasted his living among evil doers and sinners (Luke 15:11–32). The revelation of the church among the Gentiles is a deep mystery of God’s love and his determination to bring all humanity under the blessing of Abraham through Isaac and Messiah Jesus (Romans 9:7–8; Galatians 3:16).

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, “Our Father,” not “My Father,” the Father of me and my faction, my Judaism, my Orthodoxy, my Catholicism, my Protestantism. God is the Father of the “whole family”—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Mary, Jesus, Paul, Peter, James, John, Luther, Calvin, Knox, Wesley, and John XXIII—of all who claim the Father’s love. God is calling his “whole family” to love him and to love and accept our brothers and sisters who are different from us, just as he has accepted us all in Christ.

### COMMON HERITAGE

Just like the family, so the church is composed of many different members who have a common heritage as children of the Heavenly Father. We are told that the “whole family” is composed of all the saints of all ages, now in glory (the church triumphant) and now upon the earth (the church militant).

There are two opposite yet complementary sexes, male and female, with masculine and feminine traits which contain within them the completeness of humanity. These together—not separately—comprise the entire or “whole family.”: Each family is different: some of the children will have the mature wisdom and stern integrity of the father; others will have the exuberant tenderness of the mother. Some are brave and enthusiastic; others are thoughtful and tender. Some are somber, others, joyful. The children are a healthy and balanced blend of both parents. The children are individuals with distinct personalities, temperaments, and dispositions. So the church is a healthy and balanced blend of different gifts, graces, beauties, and harmonies found in every age of history.

### A COMMON UNDERSTANDING

The healthy family focuses on its agreements and works together for the good of the “whole family;” not each individual doing his/her own separate thing. What threatens the unity of the family is strife, discord, and division. Dialogue is important and necessary, therefore, in order to maintain family unity. As members of the family share their different perspectives, viewpoints, and insights, they grow together in a common understanding.

The healthy family works toward eliminating disagreements which threaten its unity. Different perspectives are part of the “whole” and should be respected and honored. Honesty and integrity

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are always necessary components to successful conversation. In dialogue, we identify factors that have created and preserved unity. We name and explain points of tension that threaten unity.

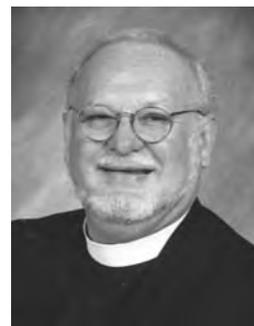
We never get family life perfect! The dynamics within families are always evolving, changing, and moving. There is no perfect family—but there is a perfect Christ. The church has a common life in him. Paul says that the “whole family” is named after him. This statement is of the Jewish mode of thinking and expression in which a name implies character. When Jacob desired to know the nature or character of Yahweh, he said, “Tell me now your name” (Genesis 32:29). When Paul says, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,” it is a way of saying that it is he on whom the church depends, who has given it substantive existence, and without whom it could not be at all.

The church is named after Christ. He is the center of all excellence—a righteousness which is entire and perfect. In him is the true harmony with proportions of all virtues united. In him is found tenderness toward sinners with no sympathy for sin, a humanity dignified and united with self-respect, a simplicity complemented by true majesty.

We are a covenant people, the church revealed in Jesus Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit. He is the living and active head of his church. It has his divine nature and character. This truth does not change in form or with time, and it is non-negotiable. I’m so glad that I’m a part of the family of God!



Dr. Terril D. Littrell is a minister and educator with over fifty years of experience in instructing believers in biblical faith. Based on the Judaic model of acceptance and affirmation, he has long been an advocate of positive biblical ecumenism, restoration principles, liturgical renewal, and racial reconciliation. Terril lives in Cleveland, Tennessee where he serves in various capacities as educator, minister, and counsellor.



**The definition that Paul gives for the church in its entirety is, “The whole family in heaven and earth”**

# The Church: Practicing Biblical Religion

## HOW TO KNOW IF RELIGION IS AUTHENTIC

BY HOWARD MORGAN, D.MIN.

**W**e are living in exciting, significant, and prophetic times. God is restoring his church. Revival and renewal are breaking out in many places around the globe. All over the world God is revealing to believers that this is the time for the church to be restored to its true foundation, its Hebraic roots, so that it will bear the kind of fruit that God originally intended for it. As God restores the church to its Hebrew foundations, it will grow because it will be well nourished. It will be empowered to accomplish God's purposes as it does his will and is trained to reign with Christ when he returns (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

Nonbiblical doctrines and practices are being exposed and purged. Believers who are growing in their hunger for the spiritual nutrition that the Bible promises are passionately pursuing the will of God. Many are extremely dissatisfied with the status quo. They do not want to be deceived by traditions, doctrines, or practices, no matter how old or cherished they may be. They are crying out to the Lord for biblical reality in their lives and churches. And God is answering!

This biblical vision will be achieved only when the church fulfills these four basic objectives:

**1) Evangelizing the Lost.** Every church should be actively engaged in local and global evangelism so that new believers are regularly added to the church. The fulfillment of the Great Commission is every Christian's responsibility. Every believer is to be an active personal witness of the Gospel. We either go ourselves, or we help to send others (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19).

**2) Equipping the saints.** In order for believers to grow in spiritual health and maturity, they must be in an environment here the Word and Spirit of God impact their whole lives. This environment should provide the necessary nutrition for growth, maturity, and development of all aspects of biblical ministry, including worship, prayer, communion, baptism, study, preaching, teaching, healing, spiritual gifts, and building quality relationships (Colossians 1:28; 2:19; Philippians



3:12; Ephesians 4:15–16; 1 Corinthians 1:7).

**3) Training the Mature.** As believers reach a certain level of maturity, they are ready for the appropriate kind of discipling, educating, and equipping needed to fulfill their particular ministries (Ephesians 4:11–12; Matthew 28:19).

**4) Sending the Trained.** All trained members are sent out to fulfill their own ministries, whether locally as part of their own church or in another place in the world. No one buries his/her talents! (Matthew 25:25).

A biblical church is evangelizing the lost, maturing the saved, training the mature, and sending the trained. Every activity a biblical church sponsors must be designed to accomplish God's eternal purpose—the maturation of the saints so that they can fulfill his will, grow into the image of Jesus, and be worthy of reigning with him (Matthew 25:21, 23; Luke 19:17, 19; Colossians 1:28; Ephesians 4:12; Romans 8:29; 2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10; 20:6; 22:5).

The church described in the Bible is a living organism, the physical body of Christ in the earth. It exists to facilitate the fulfillment of these goals in the lives of all individual believers. Any church that is not working toward the spiritual maturation of every member is practicing a nonbiblical religion.

#### TRADITION AND RITUAL VS. RELATIONSHIP

Many churches teach that your proper place is in a pew, observing and partaking in traditional rituals. You are taught that this minimal participation will alleviate guilt and justify you before God. What actually happens is that you are forced to be dependent on the “spiritual authorities” for your personal relationship with God. They take the place of Jesus as your mediator. This is the exact opposite of what the Bible promises you. Every believer is to have a strong, personal relationship with God and be dependent upon him, and not on any human organization, even if it claims to have divine origins. The biblical church is people not a building or an organization, no matter how old it may be.

Nonbiblical churches provide virtually none of the spiritual nutrition that is necessary for spiritual growth. In fact, this is one reason why reform movements have begun throughout history. Tragically, however, they also have failed because they eventually fell victim to the same spirits and strategies that create an empire of self instead of the kingdom of God. This empire seeks to keep itself in its place of power, authority, and control, rather than constantly readjusting itself to keep its vision focused on Christ's goal for the church. This refocusing is accomplished through the Holy Spirit, using the Bible and the many-membered body of Christ overseen by the gifts of ministry of Ephesians 4:11. God has provided oversight for the body of

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Christ through these gift ministries—men and women who function in the anointing of the Holy Spirit, not a professional clergy that functions because of office or title. God never intended for a clergy-laity distinction to exist. True ministry exists to see every member equipped in his/her particular ministry.

#### SPIRITUAL SLAVERY VS SPIRITUAL FREEDOM

There are many churches whose proclamation of vision sounds very good. A pastor stands in his pulpit proclaiming his vision to “evangelize the city” and calls for everyone to get involved. This is a godly, biblical vision. When the strategies to implement that vision take on nonbiblical characteristics, however, people are coerced into doing things that are not part of God's plan for their lives. This is where deception enters. The biblical mandate of all true pastors is to equip *you* to fulfill *your* ministry, teaching *you* how to do what God has put in *your* heart (Ephesians 4:11–12). Biblically based pastoral ministry to the church focuses, as Paul expressed it, on “presenting you complete [*mature*] in Christ” (Colossians 1:28). Your leaders are responsible to help you find your place in the work of the kingdom. No one has the right to put you into a place where you do not fit. The Bible teaches us that God “crafts” the body together, with each person fitting exactly in the proper place (1 Corinthians 12:18). God will lead you and your leaders into finding the place where he wants you, and when he does, you will have great peace and joy, even if your assignment is difficult.

If a church is more concerned with how you can make it grow than it is with how it can make you grow in your

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ist theories: Zionism as the exclusively secular Jewish variety of modern nationalism, and Zionism as the expression of the necessary historical movement toward the messianic era.

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personal calling and training, it—and you—have a problem! When *your* calling ceases to be important to your leaders, you have to begin to question motives: “Is the kingdom of God being built or the ‘empire of self’?” The King places great value on the gifts and calling he has assigned to you. The “emperor” sees your value only as you work to accomplish his goals. Is your pastor personally discipling you? If your pastor is too busy even to talk to you, that person is your preacher, not your *pastor*.

**GODLY AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION VS. MANIPULATION AND CONTROL**

Using Christian buzzwords like “authority” and “submission,” nonbiblical churches employ subtle and not-so-subtle means to manipulate and control. You are not given the freedom to act according to your own conscience and understanding of the Holy Spirit's leading. If you manifest too much freedom, you become a threat to the “empire of self.” You may be rejected forcefully in an attempt to intimidate others. You may be accused of having “demons of rebellion” or an “independent spirit” when you are actually expressing legitimate concerns over doctrines and practices of following the leading of the Lord. Churches like these are extremely threatened by individuals who dare to think for themselves, who pray and read the Scriptures for themselves, and who hear from God for themselves. Efforts will be made to undermine and eliminate such behavior. Some will say that you must conform to the group and to the leader if you are going to be “right

with God.” If leaders or churches threaten you with judgment and damnation because you dare to disagree with them or attempt to leave them, you know you are involved in a cult.

**DIVISION VS. UNITY**

Nonbiblical churches will try to separate you from other believers, churches, and denominations. Jesus is always working toward unity in his body; Satan is always working to divide the body of Christ. Have you ever heard a leader say something like this: “You can hear truth *only* from me (or us),” or, “We are the *only* true church, and I am the *only* true prophet”? Listen for the word *only*. It can be a danger sign that a spirit other than the Holy Spirit is at work. Be sensitive to an attitude of separation regardless as to how it is presented. A biblical church is in relation with other parts of the body of Christ and is able to look beyond cultural, traditional, and doctrinal differences to see Jesus in people's lives.

Your spiritual enemy wants to separate you from other believers by branding or vilifying them and warning you about the danger of even talking to them. Separation from the rest of the body of Christ is a satanic strategy intended to keep you under a single, insulated influence. This is fertile ground for doctrines of demons to manipulate and control you, preventing you from hearing the “whole counsel of God.” There is great strength in unity, for in the multitude of counselors there is safety (Proverbs 11:14). Only a unified church will be able to impact our society with the gospel (John 13:34; 17:21).

**LOVE OF MONEY VS. THE LOVE OF GOD**

Non-biblical churches often revolve around the love of money. Money is more important than people. It is exalted over God and becomes a primary focus. God is presented as your servant, one who can be manipulated when you give money to the “ministry.” You can get in the \$200, \$500, or \$1,000 prophecy line where the “prophet” will hear a “word” for you. In great contrast to this, Jesus said, “Freely you have received, freely give.” God is not for sale!

Jesus said that money has the ability to compete with God for your spiritual loyalty. You cannot serve two masters (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13). Additionally, financial openness and accountability are indicators of the health of a church. Things done in darkness are usually done so for a reason. God's people walk in the light. What excuses for a lack of openness do you hear?

Of course, you must also remember that the Bible teaches that workmen are worthy of their hire and that they should not receive a meager wage. If your ministers are supplying you with

***There is great strength in unity, for in the multitude of counselors there is safety. Only a unified church will be able to impact our society with the gospel.***

spiritual sustenance and training, you should be sowing liberally into their lives and ministries so that they are free from financial concerns (1 Corinthians 9:7–14).

### BY WHOSE AUTHORITY DO YOU . . .

Church leaders who operate in nonbiblical manners tend to diminish the authority of the Bible in order to exalt their own interpretations, their special revelations, or their mystical “truths.” The Bible is spoken of as an authoritative book only when it is used to justify their positing and establish their personal authority. When it is convenient, the Bible is used, but when it contradicts self-serving doctrines and practices, it is dismissed by one means or another. Be very careful when someone or something is exalted over the Scriptures as the final rule for spiritual life. Study the Scriptures. Examine such behavior in the light of the Bible, and then pray. If you are convinced that something is wrong, it may be time to discuss your concerns with your leaders. Their response to you will be a good indicator of where their hearts are and whose purposes they are really serving.

### ARE YOU BEING ENTERTAINED OR EQUIPPED?

Do you go to church because it makes you feel good? Do you go to church because you like the building? What if they met somewhere else? Are you entertained by the “song service,” or does the music ministry inspire you to worship with your whole heart? Is the preaching really dynamic and inspiring?

Is your church equipping and empowering you to do the will of God (James 1:22–25)? Too many Christians are spiritually weak because the churches they attend from week to week are not creating the kind of environment that produces the necessary nourishment for spiritual growth. Don’t allow yourself simply to be an observer of a “theatrical performance” type of church service. The “come to a building and be an observer” mentality is a substitute for the life-imparting biblical gatherings that we all need. We must be involved with others in situations where “every joint can supply” the spiritual nutrition we need to grow. Small home groups are so important and valuable because they can provide a loving, supportive, secure atmosphere that allows relationships to grow. In this way, real changes in people’s lives can be fostered, encouraged, and overseen. Loving relationships that express positive input, prayer, and lots of encouragement have tremendous potential for the personal discipleship and spiritual growth of all involved.

### NOURISHING YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE

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you are more than one year old in the Lord, you should be able to feed yourself. Your pastor and church leaders should be teaching, exhorting, challenging, comforting, counseling, and training you. In short your leaders should be your mentors who are discipling you into the image of Christ and into the fulfillment of your calling. They should be finding out about your personal vision through prayer and getting to know you, so they can nourish your development as your mature.

### PREPARING FOR ETERNITY

The Bible clearly teaches that each member of the body of Christ has a ministry and will on the day of judgment be called to give an account for that ministry (Romans 14:12; Matthew 25:14–30). If you have not discovered your ministry or if you have not and are not being trained to fulfill it or are being hindered from fulfilling it by church practice or teaching, you must take personal responsibility for your own spiritual life. If your church is not fulfilling its biblical role in providing the spiritual nourishment you need, don’t wait until you die of spiritual malnutrition! Be a good steward (Luke 12; 15). Take responsibility to fulfill your ministry. Find a church where the sustenance you need is being ministered. Don’t be discouraged. God is restoring to many churches a passion for—and knowledge of—the way to produce environments that provide such sustenance. 

Dr. Howard Morgan is an internationally recognized Bible teacher whose inspiring, equipping, and prophetic ministry has impacted the lives of believers, empowering their spiritual lives. With bases in Atlanta, Georgia; Liverpool, England; and Vancouver Island, Canada, he mentors pastors and leaders and provides oversight for many churches and ministries around the world. Howard and his wife Janet reside in Atlanta, Georgia.



**Don’t be a churchgoer or a do-nothing believer. Become a disciple, fulfill your calling, and bring forth fruit for the kingdom of God.**

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# The Church's Mission

## WITNESSING HEBREW TRUTH TO A NEO-PAGAN WORLD

BY THE LATE REV. ISAAC C. ROTTENBERG

According to Acts 1:8, Jesus' parting words to his disciples were these: "You will be my witnesses. . . ." Witness, in word and deed, is what the church is all about. To what do we witness and to what kind of world are we supposed to be witnessing? In the reflections that follow, I shall focus on six points that to me seem important for the church's witness in our day:

- 1) The church is a missionary (apostolic) body in its very being.
- 2) The church was born because of a mission from the Jews, God's original missionary people—i.e., a people called to be sent. "Salva-

tion is from the Jews" (John 4:22).

- 3) The divine revelation that has come to the world by way of Israel is foreign to our pagan hearts, and to receive it requires a radical reorientation of life and thought.

- 4) Dualistic thinking (putting soul-winning *over against* social concern, for instance) leads to false contrasts and is contrary to the biblical vision.

- 5) Nazism constituted a reemergence of ancient pagan ideas, and so do many neo-pagan manifestations in our contemporary culture.

- 6) What the world needs now is a Christian witness deeply rooted in the biblical (Hebrew) understanding of *revelation*. The key issue the church must struggle with today is that of *revelation*, not religion. Resistance to the biblical view of revelation finds its source in two notions that many people find offensive:

- a) the idea that there is authoritative truth (Torah) received from a transcendent Deity, and
- b) the idea that this truth can not only be known, but is to be shared or witnessed to.

Let us now take a brief look at each of those points.

### THE CHURCH AS A MISSIONARY BODY

The Nicene Creed mentions apostolicity as one of the chief marks of the church. We confess that the church of Jesus Christ is apostolic. What does that mean? We read in Ephesians 2:20 that the church is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone." At this point, we could engage in a long argument about "apostolic succession" (the belief that in order to have a fully valid ministry every pastor/priest needs to be ordained by a bishop who stands in an unbroken chain of succession since the apostles). Or, we could argue



about which of the numerous Christian denominations bears the greatest resemblance to the “New Testament church.” These are, however, not the issues I want to dwell on here.

The Greek word *apostolos* literally means “someone who is sent.” More specifically, an *apostolos* is someone who has been authorized to speak on behalf of another person or agency. The idea of an ambassador comes to mind, and that is precisely the imagery the apostle Paul uses in 2 Corinthians 5:20: “So, we are ambassadors for Christ . . .” We represent Christ the Lord and his reign. The synoptic gospels emphasize that Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God, sometimes called the kingdom of heaven out of a reluctance to pronounce the name of Yahweh (Matthew 3:2; 4:17; 5:3; 7:21). The church, in its witness, should always keep this broad kingdom perspective in mind. This means that we do not just witness to what we feel inside, no matter how wonderful our heartfelt walk with the Lord may be. As we shall see in a moment, the God of biblical revelation does not deal just with the human heart, but with history and the destiny of the nations. Jeremiah 31 speaks about a new covenant when the law will be written on the human heart. But in this prophet’s vision the end of the ways of God with his people is not inwardness, but a holy nation Israel, living among the nations and embodying the divine commandments in its communal life and culture.

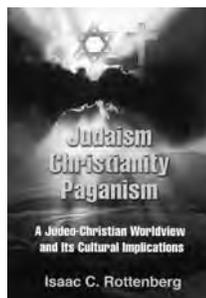
Our churches will be apostolic as long as we hold on to, live out, and share the faith and the vision of the prophets and apostles. The latter preached “the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). Then, in the power of the Spirit, radical changes took place in people’s personal and communal lives. The New Testament calls these “signs of the kingdom,” manifestations in the here and now of the promised new age to come.

The church’s mission is not an extracurricular activity, to be engaged in if time and funds permit. The church is the people of God, called out (*ekklesia*) in order to be sent. Hence, the church’s mission involves more than sending out missionaries. The Reformers talked about “the priesthood of all believers,” and in recent decades the Roman Catholic Church has re-emphasized the “lay apostolate.” During the Second Vatican Council, one bishop put it this way: “The lay apostolate consists, above all and principally, *not* in tasks assigned to the laity by the hierarchy, but in the example of a truly Christian life and the acceptance of responsibility to renew the temporal order in accordance with the principles of justice and love.” In short, Christian mission is every church member’s business.

All mission, in the biblical sense, is part of the *Missio Dei*, God’s plan of redemption for the

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world. The church is not an end in itself; it is an instrument in God’s dealings with the creation to which the Lord remained faithful in the face of all the destructive forces of human sin.

### THE CHURCH AND ISRAEL’S MISSION

It all started with God’s call (election) of Israel. The Lord reveals himself (his grace, his love) in actions. The Jewish people were chosen to be an instrument of Yaweh—chosen to serve. Biblically speaking, election is never for the purpose of creating an elite. Rather, it is for the purpose of serving God’s redemptive plan for the world, a world that has lost its way.

Why this people? The poet Lewis Browne has put concisely into words what has been on the minds of millions of people:

How odd  
of God  
to choose  
the Jews. . .

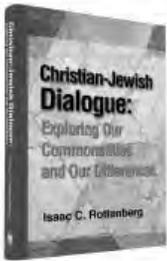
Deuteronomy 7:7–8 makes it quite clear that the Jewish people were not chosen because they were special as measured by the usual human standards (large numbers, sound morals, high culture, etc.). Rather, the answer to the mystery is to be found solely in divine sovereign love.

The covenant story between God and Israel starts with Abraham, but the end purpose is the blessing of “all the families of the earth” (Genesis 12:3). God calls Abraham for the sake of “a multitude of nations” (Genesis 17:4): “In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 22:18). Israel has a mission: “I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth”

**Jesus’ parting words to his disciples were, “You will be my witnesses.” Witness, in word and deed, is what the church is all about. The church is inherently a missionary body, a quality that is a part of its Judaic heritage.**

# Christian-Jewish Dialogue

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(Isaiah 49:6). Election, covenant, the commandments (the gift of Torah)—all these central realities in God's dealings with Israel point to the divine purpose for the world: the redemption of *all things*. For us Christians, Jesus, son of Israel, Son of God, plays *the* central role in this *Missio Dei*: "God was in Christ reconciling *the world* to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19).

But, some wonder, has not Israel failed in its mission? Aren't they finished, and isn't it now all up to the church? Both Israel and the church have failed in many ways in the mission to which God has called them, but the Lord remains faithful; the divine plan will not be frustrated because of human frailties and follies. Paul states in Romans 11:29 that "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." God is not done yet with his people Israel. Both Israel and the church will be used, in God's good time and in God's way, as instruments in the great *Missio Dei*. Yahweh will redeem nature and the nations (Isaiah 11:6–8; 20:23 ff.; Amos 9:11 ff.) and establish the reign of *shalom* upon the earth.

### DIVINE REVELATION IS FOREIGN TO PAGAN HEARTS

God encounters Abraham at the "crossroads," which is the meaning of the name *Haran*, a center of the cult devoted to the moon-god Sin. It is most likely that Abraham was devoted to some kind of religion when Yahweh came to him in revelation. He now enters a whole new world. He is addressed, confronted with the call, the commandments, and the promises of God. Abraham could have ignored revelation and stayed with his religion. But he believed and obeyed. Now he is sent on a journey of faith, venturing forth into the unknown, trusting the word of the Lord. Biblical revelation involves more than transmitting

information; it entails the redemptive presence of God in our midst.

In a few short sentences in Genesis 12:1-5, we are told the high drama of a life transformed through an encounter with the living God. So much religion comes naturally. It is said to well up from the depth of human existence. In "religion without revelation" people are not addressed; there is no authoritative word from beyond, no sense of accountability before a holy and righteous God, no call to repentance. The revelation of the God of Israel is fundamentally foreign to our pagan hearts. In many ways, it runs counter to our natural impulses. The history of both Israel and the church shows how strong the pull of nature religion, fertility cults (the search for transcendence through sensual ecstasy), and self-deification can be. In Exodus 32, we read the story of what happened when Moses was delayed on Mt. Sinai. "Come, make gods for us . . ." say the people to Aaron. And so they created the image of a young bull, the symbol of virility and the vitalistic forces of life, and these they worshipped in an orgy of eating, drinking and reveling.

The prophets of Israel were constantly engaged in what the Jewish scholar Martin Buber has called "the struggle for revelation." The Israelites saw so much religion among the surrounding populations that appealed to their natural instincts. So, they were drawn toward a kind of pluralism that did not necessarily involve getting rid of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the One who had delivered them from slavery—but rather entailed the idea of enriching the life of the nation by including beliefs and practices of religiously committed neighbors. The Baals represented the old-time religion of nature worship, with its fertility cults and temple prostitution. The prophets saw a mortal danger in this religious mix and opposed it with all their might, often at the risk of their lives.

From the start, the Christian church faced religious movements that challenged the basic view of biblical revelation. In his sermon at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17), Paul described it as a groping after God by people who were very religious in the hope that they might find him. From the biblical point of view, such religion-without-revelation is, at best, a prelude to faith in the living God, and, at worst, the idolatry of self-worship or the deification of what is thought to be the "life force." So-called Gnostic sects, with their denial of the creation and their belief that evil resides, not in the human will, but in the material/physical world, posed a real threat to the apostolic message and mission of the church. Some members abandoned the faith, following "deceitful spirits" who "forbid marriage and demand abstention from foods, which God had created

***In "religion without revelation," people are not addressed; there is no authoritative word from beyond, no sense of accountability before a holy and righteous God, no call to repentance. The revelation of the God of Israel is fundamentally foreign to our pagan hearts.***

to be received with thanksgiving . . .” (1 Timothy 4:1–3). This was all done in the name of achieving a higher spirituality, but, in fact, it represented a forsaking of divine revelation.

The apostolic message, as found in the Christian Scriptures, is deeply rooted in God’s revelation through Moses and the prophets. Once that background of the church’s witness is ignored or neglected (as it so often is in our churches), both our message and our mission to the world are bound to miss the mark.

### DUALISTIC THINKING AND FALSE CONTRASTS

There has been a growing recognition in recent decades of how, quite early in its history, Greek influences were allowed to infiltrate the faith and life of the church. In a way, that is understandable. The church fathers, forced to defend the faith against all sorts of heresies, used the language and thought-forms that were current at that time to make their points. The intent was often laudable, but the end result has been a loss of the biblical Hebrew perspective.

Biblical thought tends to be holistic and unitary in nature. The words in Deuteronomy 6:4–5 are at the center of Israel’s confession: “Hear [*Shema*], O Israel; the Lord our God is one Lord.” This confession has little to do with counting, “Is there one God, or are there many?” The biblical writers knew full well that there is a plethora of gods in the world (Psalm 82:1; 138:1; 1 Corinthians 8:5–6). The confession, however, has everything to do with the divine nature as revealed to Israel in the mighty acts of the Lord (the *magnalia Dei*)—the deeds of the Holy One who works wonders (Psalm 77:14). Yahweh has revealed himself as the God who will unite all things into the harmony (*shalom*) of the age to come.

Greek thought tends to think in dualistic terms: for instance, the soul against the body. Paul’s use of the word *flesh* has often and mistakenly been interpreted that way. But the apostle was not talking about the divine soul versus the evil body. Rather, by “flesh” he meant the whole person—body, mind and soul—in estrangement from God and in rebellion against the laws of the Lord. In Christian thinking the soul-body bifurcation has often been used to defend the primacy of saving “souls” *over against* social needs (justice, poverty, oppression, etc.). Jesus addressed both the spiritual and the physical needs of people. He called for repentance and rebirth, but he also fed the hungry and healed the sick. That should be the model for our mission. Unfortunately, by stressing either one or the other aspect of ministry, we have developed a partyline—or a this-versus-that—mentality within the body of Christ. It seems to be so difficult for us to maintain a unitary ap-

## Anti-Israelism THE NEW FACE OF ANTISEMITISM



The “new and improved” form of antisemitism is on the rise throughout the world today. This subtle manifestation of the ancient and continuing hatred of the Jews has morphed from the form that produced the Holocaust into a quest by neopagans to destroy the Jewish nation of Israel from the face of the earth and with it the very existence of the Jewish people. Dr. Garr’s book is a call to Christianity to stand up against this manifest evil and stand unequivocally for the Jewish people and their nation Israel.

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proach to our mission, to include all aspects of the glorious gospel of the kingdom of God. Churches which are constantly reacting against each other are wasting precious spiritual energy and, hence, are a poor witness to the world. God’s revelation to the people Israel will be a tremendous help in teaching us how to be a blessing to the nations. Only if we read the New Testament in light of the Old Testament will we be equipped to avoid those fatal bifurcations.

### NAZISM, A RE-EMERGENCE OF PAGAN IDEAS

Adolph Hitler hated Jews with a deep and pathological hatred and, in one of the most horrible crimes in history, he sought to wipe them from the face of the earth. However, Hitler also recognized that killing Jews was not enough; he had to rid the world of faith in the God of the Hebrews and the revelation transmitted through them. In order to achieve that goal, he turned to ancient Teutonic pagan ideas, such as the sacredness of the soil (Fatherland) and the purity of Aryan blood. This ideology of *Blut und Boden* was to become the new religion of the Third Reich.

The rise of Nazism in the heart of Europe was a dramatic demonstration of how pagan drives, just below the surface of our civilization, can re-emerge in neo-pagan forms once the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, is removed from people’s consciousness. Such a development causes radical changes, not just in individual lives, but also in the way a society is structured

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and a culture shaped.

Today, we see many more subtle manifestations of neo-paganism in countries where “the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12) has been proclaimed. We find it in the world of movies and TV (e.g., the glorification of any form of self-expression, no matter how deviant or destructive), in cults and the return to pagan rites, in art designed to shock rather than inspire, in the seductive sexuality of Madonna and company, in the nihilistic rantings of a Howard Stern, in the often outrageous ramblings of rappers, etc.

During the 1970s, the ecclesiastical airwaves were abuzz with talk about evangelism. The nationwide Key ’73 campaign, with its motto “Calling Our Continent to Christ,” was much in the news. Mainline denominational leaders, faced with steady membership and money declines, felt compelled to show their constituencies that they, too, favored evangelism. Denominational staff rushed to the drawing boards, designing new programs of outreach. The United Church of Christ advocated “Action Evangelism,” seeking “new ways and models of marrying word and deed.” The American Baptists called their program “Evangelistic Life Style.” The Methodists were seeking to recruit “New Life Missioners” for every region in the country. The 1974 World Conference on Evangelization, held in Lausanne, showed an eagerness to demonstrate that evangelicals also have a social conscience, and the Third Synod of Catholic Bishops, meeting in Rome that same year, chose as its theme “Evangelization in the Modern World.”

In recent years, there has been much talk about secularism in the “post-Christian” era, but few seem to be focusing seriously on the spirit of Neo-Paganism which is infecting the social and cultural fabric of nations. There are exceptions. In 1977, Dr. W.A. Visser’t Hooft, who had served

as the first General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, delivered an address to a German audience entitled, “Evangelism among Europe’s Neo-Pagans” (published in the October 1977 issue of the *International Review of Mission*), explaining how paganism was “far more deeply rooted in European history than is generally recognized.” The reason for that is not hard to find: paganism is deeply rooted in the human heart that has remained unaffected by the revelation of the God of Israel revealed in Jesus Christ. Would all those efforts of the 1970s have borne more fruit if the Christian world had been more seriously focused on the Hebrew roots of our faith? I suspect the answer is “yes.”

The opposition forces to the good news of the kingdom of God operate in a variety of ways. Hitler tried persecution. He should have known from history that that doesn’t work. Instead, the blood of the martyrs becomes the seed of the church. Seduction, however, tends to be much more successful. There are aspects of the New Age message that can be extremely attractive to searching souls. We like to be told that, deep down inside, we can discover our own divinity. “You are the universe; you are god!” At the end of the movie based on Shirley MacLaine’s book, *Out on a Limb*, we see the actress stand at the shores of the Pacific ocean with outstretched arms, crying out, “I am god!” If divinity resides within us and the universe, there is no need for revelation, no need to be addressed and to be called to obedience and repentance. If we are divine in our inner essence, sin is an illusion from which the New Age gospel will liberate us.

All this and more is part of the world to which we are called to witness. As we look around our neighborhoods, we are likely to find a few village atheists, very vocal, almost obsessive in their need to talk about the God they believe does not exist. Then we have the rebels, often adults who are still mad at parents and/or Sunday School teachers who—they feel—tried to force-feed them with things that seemed to have little relationship to real faith or real-life commitment. Our survey would no doubt reveal many lapsed church members, “statistical Christians,” the indifferent who, in fact, may be spiritually more deprived than the atheists or rebels, because, in the words of the book of Revelation, they are “lukewarm,” lacking true passion. As is the case with lukewarm Coke, the fizz is gone, the life of the Spirit drained from their souls.

But, increasingly, we will also find another category of person among our neighbors—namely, people like Shirley MacLaine, who were raised and taught in the church and then have exchanged a “Christianity” that did not satisfy the hunger of their hearts for another form of religion. It is those

**Rediscovering the Hebrew roots of the Christian faith is a necessity for the health of both the church and society. What the world needs now is not more religion, but more faith—a faith that finds its source and power in an encounter with the God of biblical revelation.**

spiritually starved folk who are the great challenge for the church's witness. We will have to do more than condemn. They need to be confronted with a vibrant gospel message that lovingly presents to them the claims and promises of biblical revelation. Healing comes through repentance and divine forgiveness. That is not a painless process. It's the love of Christ and Christ's people that will carry the struggling seekers through.

### WITNESS ROOTED IN HEBRAIC UNDERSTANDING

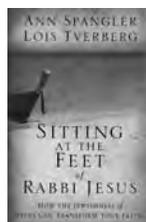
Rediscovering the Hebrew roots of the Christian faith should not just be seen as a wholesome hobby for certain aficionados; it is a necessity for the health of both the church and society. The Hebrew Scriptures contain wonderful guidelines for the care of the poor, the destitute, and the debt-ridden; instructions about our obligation toward the "stranger" in our midst; about justice in the courts, stewardship of the soil which provides us with crops, and so on and so forth. All those truths were presupposed in Jesus' preaching about the kingdom of God, and he practiced them in his daily ministry. No this-versus-that mentality there!

Like the Athenians of old, large numbers of today's Americans could be described as quite religious, at least in the sense that a great majority of them believe in some sort of Supreme Being, with a growing percentage among them apparently interested in "spirituality" and self-discovery.

Unfortunately, this tends to be a more ego-centered, rather than God-centered and neighbor-oriented, type of religion. The late Ayn Rand concluded her book, *Anthem*, with these words: "I'm done with the monster of 'we,' the word of serfdom—And now I see the face of god, and I raise this god over the earth, this god whom men have sought since men came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride. This god, this one word: 'I.'"

Here, indeed, we are far removed from the words of Jesus, who spoke about the gift of love, when serving is the opposite of serfdom, a message that is deeply rooted in Hebrew tradition: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:18).

The great Jewish thinker, Franz Rosenzweig, once made the interesting observation that "the Jew must convert the heathen in the Christian." Torah-believing Jews can, indeed, enrich the faith and life of many people who pride themselves in being Bible-believing Christians, but whose Bible is often far too small. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote the following in his book, *Israel: An Echo of Eternity*: "An ominous development is taking place in the twentieth century: man's increasing failure or inability to take the Bible seriously, his growing alien-



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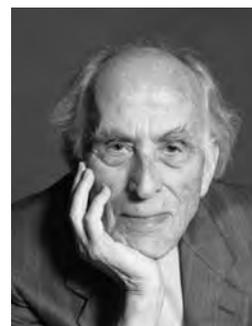
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ation from the Bible. . . . We witness a radical elimination of the Bible from the life of the people in many parts of the world. . . . The fatal disease that is infecting many minds today is politics as an isolated, autonomous science following its own rules, unhampered by moral consideration or respect for truth. . . . Politics, the use of power turns self-destructive when defying truth" (pp. 147, 83).

Despite our many and fundamental differences, Judaism and Christianity share a common vision of divine revelation. A de-Judaized Christian theology (and that label fits much current theology) will poorly serve the church of Jesus Christ as it seeks to witness to an increasingly neo-pagan world. Each in our own way, and perhaps in certain areas jointly, the church and the synagogue face the challenge of confronting the society in which the Lord has placed us with the explosive proclamation of the mighty deeds of the God of Israel as revealed in our Scriptures. What the world needs now is not more religion, but faith—a faith that finds its source and power in an encounter with the God of biblical revelation. Revelation is so different from so much religion in that it calls us to "the reckless life of faith" (Francis Briener). To paraphrase a saying by St. Augustine: "Our pagan hearts are restless, until they find peace in the presence of the God of Israel, revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures and in the apostolic witness to the Jew Jesus, whom we confess as Lord."



The late Rev. Isaac Rottenberg was former general executive of the Reformed Churches in America. He wrote extensively on theology and was a frequent contributor to various journals, often focusing on issues vital to the developing Jewish-Christian dialogue. His relationship with scholars and leaders in Judaism and in mainline Christian denominations made his insights informative, provocative, and well balanced. For years, he was a regular contributor to *Restore!*



**The church is the people of God, called out (ekklesia) in order to be sent. Our churches will be apostolic as long as we share the faith and the vision of the Hebrew prophets and apostles.**

# Hebraic Community

## A FIRST-CENTURY HEBREW FELLOWSHIP IS BORN

BY VICTORIA SARVADI, TH.D.

**M**y husband Paul and I have been attending church since the mid-'70s and in ministry since 1983. Both of us were raised in high liturgical churches, with religious formalities and creeds. We truly adored the reverence that we felt for God there, the sound of the beautiful pipe organs, the processions, recessions, and seasonal color changes of the ecclesiastical vestments.

But after losing our second child one hour after a full-term birth, we were informed that a nurse was able to baptize our baby before he passed away. This news created a lot of confusion and turmoil in us. Was baptism the way unto salvation? When we questioned these tenets of faith, we were asked not to question too much, just accept what the church taught.

### EVANGELICAL EDGE

This advice seemed to have the opposite effect on us. It was our ardent curiosity that caused us to have a desire to know the answers. Just a few months later, we found ourselves in an Evangelical Church. We began to go to Bible studies and prayer meetings. It was in these that we learned

about the importance of evangelism and sharing our testimony. From our Bible studies, we stumbled on a taboo subject that our teachers seemed to be avoiding. The Bible clearly taught us that God equips us to continue his work by the Holy Spirit until Jesus returns. This was a most astounding revelation. Again, we were cautioned: Don't go there!

So, we had come to another crossroads: should we pray and ask for God's power to reside in us and expect miracles? We decided to ignore the warnings and trust the Word of God.

### CHARISMATIC CHANGES

We soon were attending a Spirit-filled charismatic church. We were amazed to see how God was using us in encouragement, prayer, and counsel. We began to study the Bible with even more fervor. It would seem at times that revelation and understanding would just jump off the pages as the Spirit would guide and teach us. I started digging and found Leviticus 23: the *Feasts of the Lord*, God's divine appointments! Why didn't we celebrate these feasts? Didn't Jesus celebrate Passover?

So here we were again! Another word of caution came from leadership: Don't go that way! That's for the Jews! We realized it was another ancient crossroad. The scripture in Jeremiah 6:16 became so clear to us: "This is what the LORD says: 'Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths.'"

We were off on another journey to deeper enlightenment. Ancient paths. The old ways. We began to wonder, "Why had the church gotten off track? Why didn't we celebrate the feasts Jesus celebrated? Jesus was Jewish. How did he practice his faith? We had faith *in* Jesus, but we didn't really understand and know the faith *of* Jesus.

### FIRST CENTURY FOUNDATIONS

Through much studying and learning from Hebraic roots scholars, we began to recognize the



disconnect from the *Way* or *halakhab* of Yeshua and the rise and progression of Greco-Roman Christianity. The question became, Could we actually implement the ancient faith of Yeshua in this day and age?

From 1998–2005, I diligently pursued collegiate and graduate studies in *First-Century Christianity*. By this time, I was now licensed and ordained in ministry and was asked to be the Associate Minister of Education at a Hebraic Christian Congregation. We met on *Shabbat*, we taught the Jewish Roots of the faith, and we sang Hebrew songs and incorporated Davidic dance, tambourines, and banners in our worship. But I have to say the government of the congregation was no different from that of the Christian churches from which we had come: a Senior Pastor, several Associate Ministers, a Church Board, a group of elders. We were like a hybrid synagogue/church.

In 2007, after Paul and I bought a second home 250 miles away in order to be near our children on the weekends, I quickly befriended a very sweet lady who earnestly desired to learn more about the Jewish Messiah. She begged me to start a simple Bible study. She said she would invite her friends. I began to realize that God was orchestrating something new in me!

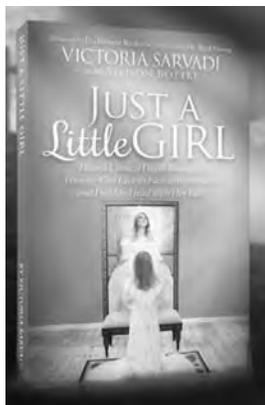
#### FORMING A FELLOWSHIP

It was so simple. We began to meet on Friday evenings. Everyone brought some food to share, so we began our time with fellowship and getting to know one another—connecting, sharing, laughing, and engaging. Deep, long-lasting friendships were created in those special intimate times of table fellowship. Afterwards, we came together to study. We studied from books by all my Hebraic scholars and teachers who had now actually become personal friends to me and my husband. I had never seen such dedication and desire to learn from any group of believers.

It occurred to me one day that the joy and simplicity we were experiencing was wrapped up in one Scripture: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42, NKJV). That was it! That was what we were doing. It was pure. It was organic. It was engaging and anointed. “Day by day they continued with one mind, spending time at the Temple and breaking bread from house to house. They were sharing meals with gladness and sincerity of heart” (Acts 2:46, TLV).

Our fellowship has purposed to communicate on prayer apps and text threads keeping in touch with everyone daily so we can pray for one another. True friendships have developed as families invite families over for dinner and socializing. We have witnessed this joy and sincerity of heart. And, of course, this little fellowship has grown.

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We begin with the sound of a shofar and the *Sh'ma*. We light the *Shabbat* candles, say blessings over our children, spouses, guests, and the entire fellowship. We then sing *Shabbat Shalom* and listen to someone from our teaching team give a brief explanation of how Yeshua has fulfilled or will fulfill the *Parashah* (the Torah portion for the week) in his first or second coming (John 5:46, BSB). 2) After announcements and a prayer, we break for dinner and fellowship. 3) After dinner, we assemble again to worship and study (hear the Word). We end the evening with the *Aaronic Benediction*.

We don’t have a Church Board, but our leadership team is transparent, and we trust one another. We have no room for egos, and we absolutely hold one another accountable. We don’t consider our fellowship a “church” by definition. Neither is it a “synagogue.” We are simply a community, believers who assemble together “to continue in the ways of the apostles.” We are Yeshua-centric, Spirit-centric and Kingdom-centric. **We are also first-century “culture and language centric.”** We seek to see and hear the Word through the lens of Yeshua’s time, culture, traditions, and language. And, together we are pressing in together, aiming for the prize of the high calling of God in our Messiah, Yeshua.



**We are a community of believers who assemble simply “to continue in the ways of the apostles.”**

Learn more about the Nathaniel Fellowship’s exciting exploration of the dynamics of organic Hebraic community when you review Dr. Sarvadi’s extensive library of inspirational, informative, and challenging materials that are posted at [www.thebethanycenter.org](http://www.thebethanycenter.org).

Dr. Victoria Sarvadi is co-founder and vice president of The Nathaniel Foundation in Kingwood, TX. She received her doctoral degree from The Center of Biblical Research in Redlands, CA, and has served the Messianic community as teacher and administrator. As a licensed minister, she is also Director the Bethany Center and Minister of the Nathaniel Fellowship, a Hebraic community in McKinney, TX. She and her husband Paul live in McKinney, TX.



# *Relationality: The Community Dynamic*

## IMAGING GOD THROUGH COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIP

BY LEON W. MOHAMMED, PH.D.

**W**hile the historical church in all of its manifestations—be they denominational or otherwise—has focused on recruiting people for membership, the cry of the human heart has always been for relationship. The very essence of the church is that of community—people who are attracted to one another by a common drive to be in relationship with God and with one another. The relationship of believers to the Messiah is couched in biological terms: “We are members of his body—of his flesh and of his bones” (Ephesians 5:30). The same imagery is employed by the apostle to describe the interrelationship of the many-membered body of the Messiah: “So in Christ we, though many,

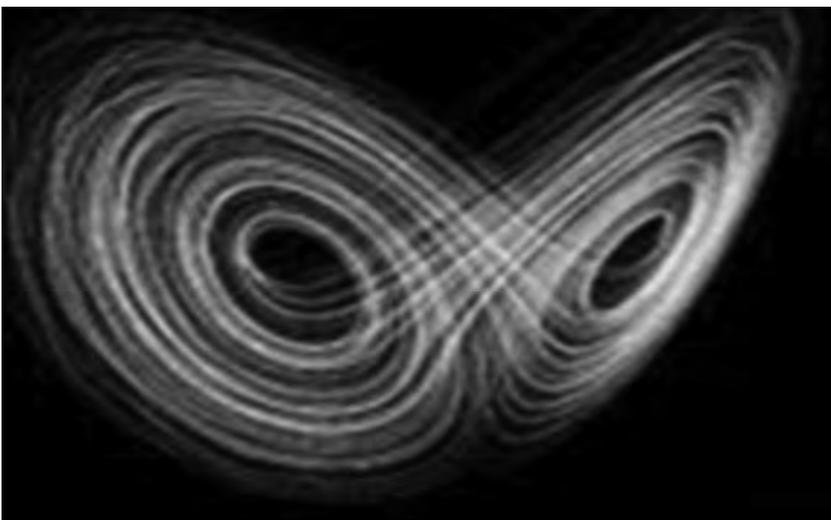
are one body . . . members one of another,” the apostle declared (Romans 12:5).

Why is it that Christianity so often seeks to define itself in terms of numbers of individuals who are members of congregations, denominations, or movements while Judaism always defines itself in terms of the families that form an extended family identified as the synagogue? It would seem that the Jewish people have remained more faithful to the divine design that God employed in his creation of both the universe and humankind. God so ordered the universe that everything is in relationship with everything else. Similarly, he created humans to be mutually attracted to one another so as to express the relationality that is the essence of humanity.

Both the universe and human beings were created to mirror their Creator. Romans 1:20 declares that the very essence of God—Godhood—can be understood by “the things that are made.” The Genesis narrative of human creation reveals this most important fact that defines human beings: “God said, Let us make humanity in our own image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). Human beings, therefore, are truly theomorphic: they bear the image of the Eternal God.

### THE RELATIONAL NATURE OF GOD

In eternity past, before all creation, God’s very being was defined in terms of pure relationality. Scripture gives the basis for this understanding by revealing that the very essence of God is “love.”



Indeed, John simply declares, “God is love” (1 John 4:8). The Cappadocian fathers of primitive Christianity defined this relationality being manifest in the three modes of divine being (persons), Father, Son, and Spirit, who mutually encircled and interpenetrated one another in pure relationality before all creation. Because God—Father, Son, and Spirit—is infinite, even after the moment when creation began, the three-in-one continue to experience this kind of interrelationality, for Jesus said, “The Father is in me, and I am in him” (John 14:11). The interrelationship of persons of Deity is so pure that it is impossible to understand their compound unity (*echad*) without the aid of divine self-disclosure that is called “revelation.” This is one of the mysteries that “we understand by faith . . . by the Word of God” (Hebrews 11:3).

### THE POWER OF THE COVENANT

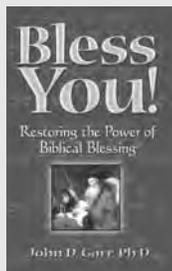
The very foundation of the Hebraic idea of church is that of community, individuals who are mutually attracted to one another by their common faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ who, by the agency of the Holy Spirit, are made into one body in him. The basis of the unity is not assured mutual benefit of a contract: it is the interrelationship that is founded in the divine principle of covenant. Those who share in the covenant of divine grace are no longer distinct, rugged individuals: they are “one body,” even as God, Father, Son and Spirit, are one. It is for this reason that they are joined, not in a society or a mutual admiration club, but in a community that the Hebrews understood as the *kahal* and the Greeks termed *ekklesia*.

This assembly is composed of those who are summoned by God (“called out”) to join him in relationship by the Holy Spirit and then are joined one to another. The foremost expression of this community is not worship: it is fellowship (*koinonia*), the relationship that the Holy Spirit empowers. The Spirit is the element that attracts and upholds the fellowship of the community. Just like the universe is created and sustained by the power of the Word of God, so the community of the church is produced and sustained by the work of the Holy Spirit.

### THE MANY-MEMBERED BODY

The apostle Paul employs the same imagery of Romans 12:5 in his epistle to the Corinthians where he extends the metaphor of the elements of the human body to explain the interaction of the many members of the body of Messiah in Romans 12:5 and to describe interdependence of the members of the church upon their relationship with one another. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-15, 27, he argues: “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body,

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so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body. . . . Even so the body is not made up on one part but many. . . . In fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. . . . Now are you the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” Then, in Ephesians 4:16, he returns to the same metaphor, saying, “The whole body [of Christ], joined together and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does it work.”

This metaphor that uses the material imagery of the multi-functioned human body to explain the many-membered body of Christ and every member of that body’s interdependence upon all its fellow members dwells on the macro level; however, it is also possible to use a similar simile to parallel the interactions of the human body with that of the body of Christ on a micro level as well.

### INERRELATED BODY ON THE MICRO LEVEL

The basic elements of the human body are amino acids, which are carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen, although there are different elements in side chains. Amino acids form proteins. Proteins form cells and muscle tissue. They are all made of the same amino acids. There are 500 naturally occurring amino acids, however, there are 20–22 amino acids in the human cell. The same amino acids make up thousands of proteins. These amino acids that form the community of proteins are made different by the number of the individual amino acids and the sequence of those acids in the particular protein chain.

For example, 5 amino acids (A), plus 4

**The many-membered body of Christ and every member of that body’s interdependence upon all its fellow members dwells on the macro level.**

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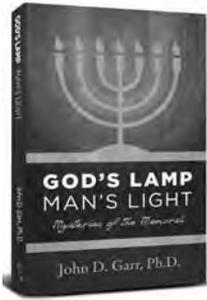
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amino acids (B), plus 10 amino acids (C) produce a unique protein. Likewise, 10 amino acids (B), plus 20 amino acids (C), plus 15 amino acids (D) produce another unique protein chain. The different proteins all have the same elements, but it is the sequencing and number of those proteins that produce the unique protein chain. The community is changed by an individual amino acid, and the amino acid itself is changed when it goes from one protein to another in a different sequence because of the change in sequence and numbering. Still, it is a part of the same community. Ultimately, a limited number of elements are involved in forming an amino acid. There are also limited numbers of proteins that are formed by the amino acids, but there are thousands and thousands of proteins. Still, they are all part of the same human body that is comprised of trillions of cells.

### INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF MEMBERS

In human biology, therefore, the basic elements of amino acids interact with one another to produce the cells of the body. On the cellular level, the proteins join in relationship one with another in an action in which the individual proteins bring about changes in the cells and in turn the cells produce changes in the individual proteins. Similarly, the body of Christ experiences a parallel interaction in which every individual member is affected and changed by its relationship to the whole, the community of believers, while the community itself is impacted and changed by the actions of the individuals that compose the body.

In the final analysis, the very organic chemistry of the human body

proves beyond any shadow of doubt that relationality is essential to the very essence of the church, the body of Christ. It is, indeed, the foundation—and to a great degree, the very essence of the church. Fellowship and interpersonal relationships on both social and spiritual levels are essential to the health of the church. Believers are not detached, isolated islands in a sea of humanity. They are inexorably drawn to other members of “like precious faith,” impelled by the Spirit to join together as one body, jointly representing the living Jesus in the earth. The church is the extended family of God.

### HONORING THE FELLOWSHIP OF CHRIST'S BODY

It is high time that the church of Jesus Christ abandon the Greek model of confrontation, confusion, and infighting, the logomachy (fighting with words) that Cicero decried. It is time for the church to reclaim its Hebrew heritage wherein its constituency is bound together in the fellowship of the Spirit—ever drawn toward the Lord and toward one another by the power of divine relationality. In this environment, the sensibilities of all believers can be mutually respected and honored as the many-membered body profits from the diversity of gifts and callings within it. As Paul said, every member of the body can “be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Romans 14:5), and patience is given the opportunity to do its perfect work (James 1:4–8).

The true Hebraic community (church) represents unity among diversity by means of the cohesiveness that only the Spirit can produce and maintain. In this environment, everyone is free to be: to be what God has called them to be and to do what God has called them to do. The spirit of judgmentalism is absent because legalistic constraints are not imposed or maintained. The freedom to be the one body in Christ is produced by affirmation of the healthy truth that we share in relationship, not membership, in love, not constraint. This is the beauty of the Hebraic community that Jesus and his disciples experienced, and it is the blessing that is available to those who understand once and for all that the church is a Hebrew community. 

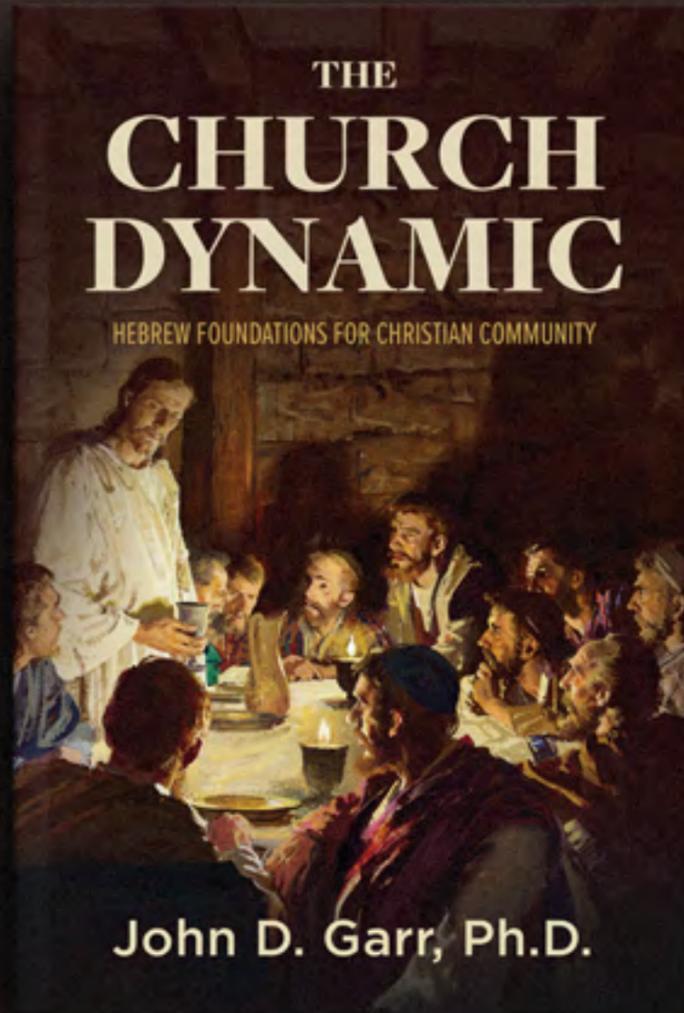
Dr. Leon Mohammed has become an authority on the application of the Judaic heritage of the Christian church in the lives of various ethnic communities throughout the world. A trained scientist, he is also a scholar in the field of Theocentric Physics. His challenging and enlightening teaching has inspired audiences in various faith communities around the world. Leon lives in Asheville, North Carolina.



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The believers whom God summoned to partner with him in communicating the good news of his plan to redeem humanity were always a sharing, learning, and worshiping community. The Holy Scriptures reveal these chosen people who were redeemed by the Almighty and translated into the kingdom of God, noting that they first united in fellowship with God and others, then dedicated themselves to acquiring knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, and finally devoted themselves to bearing witness to the one God and worshiping him with all their heart, soul, and strength.

*The Church Dynamic: Hebrew Foundations for Christian Community* provides an in-depth analysis of this biblical faith community by examining the texts of Scripture that speak of the called-out ones and the dynamics of their interaction with God and with one another. By locating the Christian church in the first-century Jewish milieu from which it emerged, this book uncovers long-obscured Hebrew truth and affirms the bedrock foundations on which the faith of Jesus and the apostles was built.

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