

Form and Function

Burning Incense to a Delusion

By George Davis

But my people have forgotten me, they burn offerings to a delusion; they have stumbled in their ways, in the ancient roads, and have gone into bypaths, not the highway. (Jeremiah 18:15 RV)

The Lord says: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder; the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish." (Isaiah 29:13-14 NIV)

These scriptures attest to an irrefutable historic fact. The history of Israel, as well as the church, is an ongoing saga characterized by their habitual tendency to forget God. But there is something man has never forgotten, something to which he continually expresses his utter and undying loyalty. Though man has repeatedly forgotten God, he has never forgotten religion. Drawing near to God with their mouths while their hearts were far from him, they continued to burn incense long after the reality and dynamic of their relationship to God had paled. They replaced the worship of God with rules taught by men. The true object of worship (God) was replaced by the worship of worship itself. Throughout all of church history, we witness this same human propensity to trade down from Christ to the traditions of men. Incredibly, many don't even know of this great satanic ruse that has defrauded us and deprived us of our birthright by trickery. Because religion works quite well without God, being little effected by His absence, the religious man, while supposing that the correct religious forms and functions will bring life, unwittingly ignores the very fountainhead of life itself.

The church in its inception, being birthed by God, was a living, vital organism, impassioned in their love for Christ and endued by the power of the Holy Spirit. Their example is still crying out against the abnormal, sub par, religious institutions or bypaths which have been substituted for the highway.

This is a call to repentance, a call to return. A call to drop our religious playthings, and remember. It is a call to remember the heights from which we have fallen (Revelation 2:5), a call to return to our first love (Revelation 2:4). It is call to hear the One who has

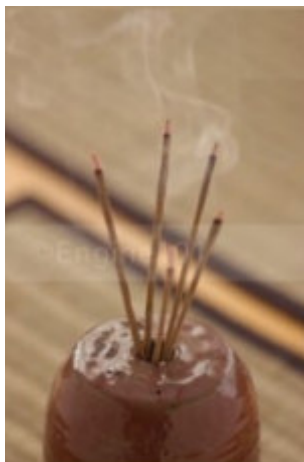
been locked out, forgotten, and left standing at the door knocking. It is a call to hear His voice, open the door, and sup with Him (Revelation 3:20).

"I will build. . ."

The first century Christians, unlike us today, were little concerned with form and function. The idea of Church structure occupied little or no space in their minds. The first century Christian community knew nothing of ecclesiology, because the science of the church as a organized society had not been invented yet. Nor did they preoccupy themselves with thoughts of church architecture and decoration. They did however, have a message to be preached, a testimony to be declared, a gospel to be heralded, and a glorious communion to revel in together. Christ did not leave a blueprint for the Church. Why would he, for it is his workmanship not ours. He said, "I will build my Church," and gave no manufacturers manual or pattern for its construction. The first century believers were concerned with the proclamation of a person, not the building of an institution called "the church." As they declared the person of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, things began to take shape. And as Christ built, they observed and learned.

Life Precedes Form and Function

The unborn child in its mother's womb initially lacks form and function. However, as life gives way to greater life, things begin to take shape. Fingers and toes gradually appear, and with the increase of form comes increased movement or function. Even after birth, form and function continue to increase until finally this child that once bounced off its mothers uterine wall, can run, play, communicate, invent, create glorious finger paintings, and love deeply. All this from one cell? So it was with the first century Church; divine life brought its own form and function.



Today, the lack of life in the church has resulted in an interest in the early Church pattern. Looking back over these 1900-plus years, many conclude that if we could just get the primitive pattern back we would experience its life. The deception here is in the belief that the secret of life is in the proper form and function, and that in arriving at the correct pattern, the correct method, God is then obligated and will bless. We have a

tendency to get the cart well before the horse. It all began with life, not with doing. Christ's' final instruction to his disciples was,

". . . behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high." Luke 24:49 "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." [Acts 1:8](#)

And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. [Acts 1:13-14](#)

If we really want to experience the life that the first century church experienced, here is where it began. On our knees in one accord, waiting, and praying until we are endued with power from on high. If we were truly aware of our barrenness and ceased from our dead works, and gathered together in one accord to pray, we would once again witness the life and dynamic of the first century *ekklesia*. If we will seek Christ until He comes and rains righteousness on us, then and only then will we know true church reform.

For what purpose did God empower the first century church?

The Holy Spirit was given for the purpose of bearing witness. A witness that consisted of more than just saying that Christ was the Messiah, and had risen from the dead, but a witness that proved it, a witness of power, demonstrating that He is alive, and is responsible for the mighty acts being seen.

[And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. 1 Corinthians 2:4-5](#)

Does our faith stand in theology or in reality? Have we truly experienced the reality of what we postulate? Is our doctrine the explanation of our present reality, or are we endeavoring to understand what in its very nature is infinite and unapproachable by our

human intellects? Is the nature of our relationship to the truth of the gospel more philosophical than experiential? Do we expect the world to believe that Jesus is who we say He is, based simply on our word? Does our faith stand in the wisdom of men, or in the power of God? Do we believe that Jesus is still alive, that He is still the Messiah, and that He is still the Lord? If we do, it is time to put-up or shut-up. It is time to seek God until He empowers us to preach Jesus in a manner worthy of Him--in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Is it any wonder that many today, whose faith rests upon the enticing words of man's wisdom, doubt their salvation? The modern-day Church seems more concerned about being theologically correct than being truly effective.

The first-century *ekklesia* walked, moment by moment, in the reality of resurrection life. They experienced the wonder and excitement of living in the spontaneity of the Spirit, having no idea what God would do next. They were surrounded with the reality of the risen Christ and could speak of nothing else. They spoke of those things they had seen and heard, what their hands had handled, of the Word of life. (1 John 1:1)

A day in the life of the first century *Ekklesia*

The Temple was bustling, the crowd stood in amazement and wonder, their eyes trained upon him. How is it that this man, lame from birth, is suddenly able to walk? This once lame beggar, only moments before, had received the shock of his lifetime. Peter, having no money, reached out his hand and pulled him to his feet, commanding him to walk. Saying, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." Immediately, his feet and ankles receiving strength, he followed Peter and John into the Temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

This created quite a stir in the Jewish religious community. The priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, grieved that Peter was teaching the people that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead and had performed this miracle, threw them into jail until the next day. The next morning, Annas the high priest and Caiaphas with the rulers, elders, and scribes, gathered around Peter and John and asked, "By what power, or by what name, have you done this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them,

Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. (Acts.4:8-14)

None the less they "commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye" (Acts.4:19). After properly threatening them, they let them go. Peter and John, returned to the *ekklesia* and reported what the chief priests and elders had said. After hearing their report, they immediately raised their voices together in prayer. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: 'Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.' Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus" (Acts4:24-30 NIV).

The Spirit did enable them to speak God's word. Moreover, God did stretch forth his hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of his holy servant Jesus. This is the life they shared. This is the *ekklesia* first century style. May their heart and passion become ours. May their understanding of the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit become ours as well! May we know, as they did, the joy of working with God. May it be said of us as it was said of them, "And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16:20).

Regrettably, much of what is now called church reform is nothing more than the replacing of one form for another--the discarding of an old form that is a proven failure with a new form thought to be closer to the primitive pattern. The fact is that we are concerned about something that the first century believer was not. They were not ecclesiastically minded. They were not concerned with organizing an institution. They knew that the increase was from God, and that true fruit was the product of abiding in Christ.

Filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ--to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:11 NIV

Christ's *ekklesia* is a living vital organism, not a structure maintained by administrative personnel. It is the body of Christ, built by Christ, the Head, and completely orchestrated by the Spirit of God, having one priesthood, the priesthood of all believers. What man builds organizationally must be maintained by the rule of man. He will dominate, legislate, formulate creeds, and institute rituals, all lacking divine authenticity. God will not sustain what is not birthed by Him. This man-powered system and its ministries must be born along by the inertia of mere human organization, fueled by the latest and finest programs. There are many sincere Christians in these organizations that love the Lord with all their hearts. These are our brothers and sisters in captivity. The general tendency of human organization is to unwittingly lead away from abiding trust in Christ, constantly distracting the believer by placing the emphasis on outer observances, rather than dependency upon the indwelling Christ. What is more, the sense of wonder and spontaneity that is our birthright is assaulted and weakened by systematic theology, and then methodically analyzed to death.

Most of the recorded preaching in the New Testament was spoken to explain the occurrences of divine life. It was more this is that, in explanation of the current reality, rather than an attempt to create life by a well presented, homiletically correct sermon (Acts:2:16). First-century preaching was most often an explanation of the expression of divine life, pointing to the source of that life--Jesus. May God restore to each of us the dynamic and reality of the risen Christ! So much so, that our time will be spent explaining God's marvelous works, saying, "This is that, Christ is risen. He is alive, and here is the proof of it." Most of the so-called sermons" of today's church are spoken to motivate the Christian toward some preconceived end. "If you will just do this or that, life will be the result." There is little call to explain what God is doing among us. The

noise and activity of the religious machine, distracting us from the truth of our barrenness, blinded through compromise and bound to a treadmill, we grind out the same routine every day, every week. There is a big difference between the organic expression of divine life and the treadmill of the institutional church. Many are so busy trying to produce life by a systematic means that they cannot hear the call from God's vineyard, a call to fruitfulness, a call to abide in the vine.

Thomas Aquinas is considered by many to have been the greatest theologian of church history. His writings form the basis for most of the Roman Catholic theology. This Italian philosopher, called the prince of scholastics, saw something while writing about Jesus that made his current theology obsolete. All of his theories were murdered by a gang of ugly facts. Here is his story as told by Ray C. Stedman.

"His classmates called him "the Dumb Ox" because he was heavysset, serious, and usually silent. Historians, however, call him 'the Angelic Doctor,' and Roman Catholics revere him as a saint. His name: Thomas Aquinas--the most influential theologian of the thirteenth century. . . .

The life mission of Thomas Aquinas was to reconcile the Christian faith with human reason, and to intellectually prove the existence of God. Of the many theological books Aquinas wrote, his final work--the *Summa Theologica* or *Summary Treatise of Theology* (1265-73)--is considered his greatest and most important. Amazingly, Aquinas himself never finished the *Summa Theologica*. No, he didn't die before it could be completed. He simply lost interest and stopped writing!

What happened to Aquinas that made him abruptly abandon his lifelong pursuit of theology? We find a clue in the fact that his great unfinished work was composed of three parts: "On God," "The Moral Life of Man," and "On Christ." He had completed the first two sections and was deep into the writing of the final section on Christ when something happened to him--a profound and emotionally shattering spiritual experience. Aquinas himself was never able to put that life-changing experience into words, but many who have studied his life believe that, in the process of writing about Christ and meditating on our Lord's life and words, Aquinas experienced a vision in which he came face to face with the Savior.

Following his spiritual encounter with Jesus, Aquinas said, "I have seen that which makes all I have written and taught look small to me. My writing days are over." And with that, he simply stopped writing, leaving his theological masterpiece on Christ unfinished. All human pursuits--even the study of religion and theology--are mere pale

imitations once we come into the presence of the Great Reality, Jesus Himself."
(*Authentic Christianity*, by Ray C. Stedman)

Our religion is what we fill our time with in Christ's absence. May God make our religion obsolete in the face of Jesus Christ. May we, like Thomas, abandon our fruitless methods for the reality of the Master.

Beginning Small--The Mustard Seed

Jesus, in explaining the kingdom of God to his disciples, said, "Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it" (Luke 13: 18-19).

The church, like the kingdom, is organic and is like the mustard seed. The mustard seed is among the smallest seeds, but you cannot tell by looking at the seed what the plant will look like when it is full-grown. The pattern is in the seed; it will bear fruit after its kind. In the same way, the Church has its own divine DNA and will grow accordingly.

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:20)

Here is the mustard seed church. The Greek word for gathered together is *sunago*, which means to lead together, and according to Strong, its specific end in view is hospitably. The atom of the *ekklesia* is the family. It is the basic unit of society. It is the place where we share our lives together. It is a place devoid of pretense, a place where we can take off our masks, for after all, everybody already knows what's under them. If only two or three gather together in a manner worthy of Christ, a manner in keeping with his name to seek him without pomp or pretense, Christ will be there. "There am I in the midst of them." If He is in the midst, if He is the center, the focus, the only reason for our gathering, then and only then will we witness the dynamic of the *ekklesia*.

There is nowhere in all of scripture where anyone stressed, directly or indirectly, the supposed importance of gathering in large numbers. The twentieth century institutional Church wants to do everything in a big way. The larger the better. The institutional church gatherings of today have become incredible multimedia events. Supposing that

the numbers justify the means, the sky is the limit. Concerned with numerical growth, and the supposed need for the church to appeal to the masses, this new program driven machine, mass manufactures unique religious experiences, tailored to appeal to the interests and cater to the comfort of a specific demographic. The denominational churches, in competition with each other, will not be outdone. The one providing the best entertainment, the best worship, the best nursery, the best youth group, and the most homiletically correct sermons is the winner.

"One hundred religious persons knit into a unity by careful organization do not constitute a church any more than eleven dead men make a football team."
(A.W.Tozer)

If we do not learn the basic arithmetic of Christ's Kingdom, we will never see the *ekklesia*.

2 or 3 + Jesus = The *ekklesia*

Jesus also likened the Kingdom of Heaven to leaven. "[Another parable spake he unto them, 'The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened'" \(Matthew 13:33\)](#) Contained in this simple parable is a picture of church growth and evangelism. Two or three meeting in their homes, around the head, who is Christ, are the leaven. Their communities, the three measures of meal drawn by the witness of their visible love for each other, succumb to the love of Christ next door--until finally the whole world is effected. Christ did not send us to entertain the world, but to effect it with the subtle and yet overwhelming dynamic of His love, in community. This is the leaven of the Kingdom, and just a little of this leaven goes a long way. It is a matter of beginning with the right ingredients--2 or 3+ Jesus. These ingredients will always have a leavening effect.

leav·en: An element, influence, or agent that works subtly to lighten, enliven, or modify a whole. (*American Heritage Dictionary*)

Two or three plus Jesus is the agent that works subtly to lighten, enliven, and modify the whole world. It is the mustard seed church that will grow into a great tree and spread its branches around the world. Man's preoccupation with the question of how to build the church, how to build something large and significant for God, has led him away from this simple truth. May God restore to us the simplicity of the faith. A faith

that rests in His sovereignty and simply believes that if we gather around Christ, God will grow the *ekklesia*. May we say with David, "[Neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me](#)" (Psalm 131:1). Anyone, other than Christ, who entertains thoughts of building the church is exercising themselves in great matters and in things too high for mortal man. This is something far beyond man's organizational capabilities. Though the mustard seed church is powerful, it is also fragile and cannot be handled by the brash hands of human organization. Man cannot build the *ekklesia* any more than he could build a tree.

The early Church preached Jesus and the Holy Spirit honored the word with miracles and healings. In today's church, there is much talk about "the method." We labor under the mistaken idea that to teach about something long enough will eventually result in its reality. We teach, how to do what once came as natural as breathing to the first century *ekklesia*. We teach the acceptable manner and method. For after all, we cannot have people individually doing what they think the Spirit is bidding. Our preoccupation is with the method God will honor rather than his Son. The twentieth century church, digressing down a pathway of systematic frustration, continues her search for that magic formula. Weary and defeated, exchanging one failed method for another, she questions all, but pathway itself.

["The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."](#) John 3:8 NIV

The Spirit blows where it pleases or it blows not at all. He cannot be second-guessed. The Holy Spirit will not be reduced to or restricted by our methods. He will not compete with even the best of our ideas. Even good ideas, which do not originate in the mind of God, are considered dead works.

Shadow or Substance

While I believe that meeting in the homes affords the believer a greater freedom to respond to Gods' Spirit, just meeting in homes can become another method. The wonderful thing about methods is that they leave us in control. We are building. We determine its shape, form and function.

The home church movement is in danger of going the way of the institutional church. The all-revealing question is; who is building? Recently, while reading the writings of

one who has greatly enriched the lives of many in the home church community, I read these words, "The only way to renew the institutional church is to wholly disassemble it and build something far different and far better. Put another way, the church doesn't need renewal as much as it needs replacement." It is not my intention to disparage, discredit, or embarrass this brother, so I shall not mention his name. For in many ways our speech betrays us all. But this single quote cannot go unchallenged, for it is laced with the poison that has crippled every move of God through the reformation.

Did Luther intend to build something far different and far better?

Did Calvin intend to build something far different and far better?

Did Wesley intend to build something far different and far better?

These are some of the founders of the institutional churches. I agree that they do need to be disassembled. These so-called "reformers" however, had two things in common-- good intentions, and the fact that they built. What they built remains with us today and needs replacement. I beg of you, please don't build today what will be tomorrow's immovable, religious obstructions. What we build today may be around long after we are dead, and many then living may wish that we had died sooner.

God does have a replacement for the institutional church. Jesus Christ, the same reality and substance that replaced all the shadows and rituals of days gone by, is here. A greater than the Temple, a greater than our institutions is here. Christ, the reality to which the shadow Hebrews 8:5 could only vaguely attest, is here. The One whom Thomas Aquinas encountered, that made a lifetime of theological and philosophical pursuits obsolete, is here. The Replacement is here! God forbid that we should once again obscure Christ in the vague and shadowy haze of our religion.

Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body (reality) is of Christ. ([Colossians 2:17](#))

All types and systems that preceded the coming of Christ were made obsolete. The tabernacle of Moses and the law, the temple with all its rituals and carnal ordinances, were imposed until the time of reformation (Hebrews 9:10). The rending of the veil signified a change. Old things were passing away in order that a greater reality might take their place, the reality of Christ himself. ["The mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen](#)

to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27 NIV).

This is the mystery. "Christ in you, the hope of glory." There is no other hope. Which will we choose, the shadow or the reality, which is Christ?

"What is the Church? It is Christ in living union with His own. That is the Church. You do not build a special building and call it "the Church." You do not have a special organization--a religious institution--which you call "the Church." Believers in living union with the risen Lord constitute Church. This is the reality, not the figure." (T.A. Sparks)

Our religious procedures and techniques, even the home church kind, are the enemies of the real. Through mimicry, they hinder the realization of what we have endeavored to inspire. The fruit of the transforming power of Christ, changing, enabling, and birthing his purposes in us, carried on the wings of the Spirit, conceived, born, and actualized by the breath of God. God has not called us from the building of institutions to the building of home churches. He has called us to gather around his Son in the glorious communion of the Holy Spirit. May we learn the difference between being the church, the *ekklesia*, and building.

Fruitfulness

The whole purpose for our deliverance from the law, with its systematic and external forms of holiness, was that we might bring forth fruit unto God. We cannot serve in the newness of spirit while we are bound by the oldness of the letter.

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, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. (Romans 7:4)

The Greek word here for fruit is *Karpophoreo*, which means to be fertile. The picture here is of a wife bearing her husband's offspring. Likewise we must know the deliverance from the systematic, methodical and purely external, before we can become fertile and know the kind of intimacy that results in fruit. There can be no marriage to Christ while we are flirting with The Law. Name me one wife, other than Mary, who conceived, and brought forth offspring without being intimate with her

husband. There is no fruit without intimacy. And there can be no intimacy with Christ while we are married to the forms and functions of external religion.

"Do this and live, the law commands, but neither gives me feet nor hands. A better way the gospel brings, it bids me fly, and gives me wings" (Author unknown)

The "do this and live" approach to Christianity is legalism, pure and simple. Unless we begin where the first century *ekklesia* began, we will never bear the fruit that they bore. Let us go to the root, and the fruit will take care of itself. Fruit bearing is the byproduct of our union with Christ. It is not the result of strain or personal discipline. Any fruit tree is capable of bearing fruit if its taproot finds the source of life.

"I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." (John 15:5-13)

He is our beginning and our end, our alpha and omega (Revelation 1:8). We must begin with Christ. He is our life, our point of origin. He is the pattern for conformity. From glory to glory, we are changed. As we behold him, we are changed into his likeness.

Our heritage of over 1800 years of preoccupation with form and function without life, a form of godliness without power, does not die easily. The title Methodist given to one of the major denominations describes the mindset of all the institutional churches. They are all methodists, looking for the method. One who emphasizes or insists on systematic procedure is a methodist.

The reformation, not unlike what is called Church reform today, was more external than internal. Most of the changes were in the outer form, not in the hearts of men. This is

most obvious by the amount of bloodshed that accompanied it. It lacked the fruit of the Spirit. They believed in salvation by faith, but God help the man who would disagree with them. Down through the years preoccupation with external reform has been the earmark of Catholic and Protestant reform.

"The basic trouble (with the institutional church) is that the proposed cure has such a striking similarity to the disease." (Elton Trueblood, *The Company of the Committed*)

You cannot take this institution called "the church" that was conceived in Greco-Roman paganism and transform it into a creation of God. I tell you with confidence that God is tearing this counterfeit down. It is a pseudo-church concerned primarily with external things, and like the Pharisees, the outside of the cup is beautiful, but brace yourself if you dare to peak inside. We must have our minds renewed to view the church as an organism, not as an institution. People may forget God, but it seems they never forget religion. As it is so often with religion, worship itself becomes more important than the object of worship. Religion works quite well without God, and is little changed by His absence. The religious man continues to burn incense long after the reality is gone. Those who have forgotten Christ, who have traded him for religion, will inevitably burn incense to a delusion.

But my people have forgotten me, they burn offerings to a delusion; they have stumbled in their ways, in the ancient roads, and have gone into bypaths, not the highway. (Jeremiah 18:15 RV)

We are "The Body of Christ," "The fullness of him." Divine life takes one form and one form only, and that form is Jesus. The true Church is the body of Christ. The message she heralds is Christ, the form and likeness that she bears is His. What was the first century church preoccupied with? What is it that makes us more like them? They were preoccupied with Jesus. This is the first century model. This is the pattern. This is Church Restoration 101. The church is nothing more than God's kids gathered around Christ.

Those of us who meet in homes are in a unique position, being somewhat freer from the traditions of men, their methods, and their forms--free to return to the ancient paths, free to gather around the Head, who is Christ. Let us have the kind of faith that believes that form and function will flow out of communion, and out of our abiding attachment to the Vine. Life produces fruit, and fruit is the product of life, not

organization. Our call is to abide in and gather around the Head to receive and share His life.

"I must reiterate that the Church is not a thing; it is not an institution; it is not a denomination, nor is it all denominations put together. It is not anything like that. The Church is a Person expressed in mankind, expressed in human life. The Apostles never went anywhere with the preconceived idea: we will have a church here; we will set up a church here; we will form a church here. No, they went and preached Jesus Christ; and when people saw God they began to see Jesus Christ, He became the Cohesive Power drawing together, and if they were really on that ground, what did they meet? They met Jesus Christ. They met Jesus Christ-that is the Church, and there is no other Church in the New Testament." (T. Austin Sparks)

The preoccupation with form and function rather than Christ has resulted in a plethora of different churches, all ascribing to different forms and functions and all flagrantly missing God's mark. If all of these churches are abiding in the same vine and are gathering around the same head, receiving the guidance of the same Spirit, why are we so divided? Why are we so different? We can only stand unified as we abide in Christ, as we gather around Him. Oh, let us not further divide God's family by adding one more method, one more program.

Father, deliver us from the morass of methodology to the glorious reality of abiding-- from the works of the flesh to the fruit of the Spirit. And as we individually and corporately gather around The Head, your Son Christ Jesus, may it come to pass that, one day we may look around us to realize that the whole family is there. United at last, around the only and true center, the only ground of unity--Christ himself.