

# The Church Coming to Fulness

This is a provocative and conjectural paper for discussion. I admit at the outset that it is a subjective view and that many folk will dismiss it out of hand as being based on selective historical facts. I am not, however, seeking to establish a case that this is how church history must be read, and I explain that there is much bleeding between the eras discussed. History is never anything but messy and is only tidied up by historians that all have various axes to grind. To understand anything close to the truth one has to read several books on any historical subject. Often one respected author will maintain the very opposite of another.

However, the general principle of what I am describing has merit. No one doubts that the early church was the most pure, perfect and powerful expression of Biblical church life. Again, few would claim that God's intention to have a glorious testimony in the church at the end is not going to happen. (Some Premillennialists may do so, but even they would see that the bunkered down end-time church has a purity and perfection despite its suffering.) In between these crescendos there is an observable tendency for man to dominate church life; this is seen in three streams (often concurrent, but in some ages one prevails), i.e. domination by men manipulating intellect, will and subjective emotion.

What is the point of this paper? My vision is always to see a restoration of Biblical church life, something that is hardly discussed or practised anywhere at all. To understand my exegetical position on this you will need to read other papers.<sup>1</sup> I believe that God's purpose for the church is that there will be a return to these Biblical practices at the end. This paper seeks to put this view into a historical context as a further challenge to leaders to review their thoughts on church life.

## God's promise - the end-time church will have a complete testimony

God's purposes in the world will come to fruition. Everything God does is perfect and nothing he does will ever fall short of his intended purpose. This means that God's plan for the church, as the gathering of the elect - his primary work in the world, will be fulfilled in every detail. The church will be a complete testimony to the glory of God in the process of this gathering by God. Even in its weakest times, the church witnesses to the grace and glory of the Lord; but in the end the testimony will burn brightest. God's purposes will have reached maturity.

### **The wheat and tares**

Jesus taught, in a parable, about the church coming to fulness. In the story of the wheat and tares the simple point he makes is that both the tares and wheat are left to come to fulness until the time of harvest:

Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.' ... He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked *one*. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. (Matt 13:30, 37-39)

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<sup>1</sup> Such as: *Some forgotten New Testament Truths About The Church* (booklet); *How Biblical Is the Modern Church?* (a tabular discussion); *A Biblical Challenge To Current Unbiblical Church Practices*.

The church is sowed as grain, but at the end it is ready to be harvested as full-grown wheat. Firstly, this means that the full number of the elect is ready for heaven. The church is mature, the wheat is fully ripe. But secondly this means that there is a testimony of fulness, a mature testimony; there is clarity in God's final earthly testimony. It will be seen that the wheat is fully mature; the testimony to God in the end-time church is full and complete.

Today we are seeing the tares comes to fulness in every way as society degenerates ever more fully, but we are not yet seeing the church come to fulness in any sense. Churches are collapsing, large numbers are leaving the churches, missions are failing, methodologies are unbiblical, teaching is erroneous and converts are few or spurious. We have yet to see the fulness that Jesus intimated in this parable. In a time to come there will be a greater manifestation of God's testimony in the church.

### The two witnesses

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot *for* forty-two months.

'And I will give *power* to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth. And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them.' (Rev 11:1-7)

The context introduces us to the temple, the altar and those who worship God; we are clearly dealing with the church here. The court is the domain of superficial, professing Christianity and the treading down of the holy city is the corruption of worship and oppression of the church. [The 'holy city' is the church - Rev 21:2.] This is the apostasy and taking over of the church by false, pagan, occult elements. Within the holy city there is a pure testimony maintained in the temple and the altar areas - genuine Christian worship continues in the true core of the church. The measuring is the preservation of the church. The devil's persecution and false religion will not harm or mar the true church and this persecution can only continue for a limited time fixed by God (see later).

Regarding the two witnesses, this is a picture of mature testimony. The number 'two' is the Biblical number of fulness of testimony.<sup>2</sup> Not only that but a prophet is a minister of testimony, he bears witness to what God has to say to men. The olive tree is a symbol of testimony, being a symbol of Israel in the OT and the church in the NT (Rm 11:17. 24). Lampstands are symbolic of testimony - light shining out. The church is likened to a lampstand and the church is God's testimony.<sup>3</sup> This points to a multiple testimony to God in the end times.

We could spend a long time discussing exactly what the two witnesses are. There have been a number of candidates. However, John tells us that the witnesses are the two olive trees

<sup>2</sup> For certainty of testimony there needed to be at least two witnesses (Deut 17:6). It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true (Jn 8:17-18). The testimony of God's law was two tablets of stone (Deut 4:13). For effective witness to the Gospel, Jesus sent out 70 workers in pairs (Lk 10:1). God's revelation (testimony) is in two parts: the OT and NT. The second person of the Trinity is called 'the faithful witness' (Rev 1:5).

<sup>3</sup> The seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches (Rev 1:20).

and lampstands - God's witness in his chosen people, the church. These are not individuals.<sup>4</sup> John is clearly pointing to the two witnesses of Zechariah 4.

And he said to me, 'What do you see?' So I said, 'I am looking, and there *is* a lampstand of solid gold with a bowl on top of it, and on the *stand* seven lamps with seven pipes to the seven lamps. Two olive trees *are* by it, one at the right of the bowl and the other at its left.' ... 'This *is* the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,' Says the LORD of hosts. ... 'What *are* these two olive trees -- at the right of the lampstand and at its left?' ... 'What *are these* two olive branches that *drip* into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden *oil* drains?' ... 'These *are* the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.' (Zech 4:2-3, 6, 11-12, 14)

Here the symbols of lampstands and olive trees represent Christ in his office of priest and king (through the representation of Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel the prince). Only the offices of priests and kings were anointed with oil and only Christ was anointed to both.<sup>5</sup> The church is the body of Christ; as Christ the head is God's testimony in heaven, the church which is his body is God's testimony on Earth.

The two witnesses are, therefore, the testimony of God manifested through the elect gathered into the church throughout time. The sackcloth refers to the preaching of repentance - the Gospel message. The testimony highlighted here is to the truth during the whole Gospel age - 1260 days (= 42 months, 3½ years). Just as God had a witnesses in the Old Testament - the elect remnant church within Israel, so in the age since Christ he has a divine testimony through the elect in the church.

The references to fire and water are related to the holiness of God and the word of God, they are not to be taken literally. Drought is the withdrawal of God's grace and word. In the end there will be a famine of God's word, a time when the Bible is held in contempt. [Surely we are in this time.] Blood symbolises death. Water into blood means the water of God's word being turned into the means of judgment and death on those who reject God.

The church testifies to the glory and righteousness of Christ and points people to him as the only saviour from sin. Where this message is rejected, the end result is condemnation and death. While this condition continues throughout church history, John is highlighting that, at the end, there is an outshining of testimony that produces a retaliation from the devil and a silencing of the testimony before the end comes. The features develop in extremes towards the end: apostasy increases, the light shines brighter, the testimony is greater. At the end of the testimony of the church there is widespread persecution as the devil makes war on the saints of the Lamb.

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<sup>4</sup> For instance they are not Elijah and Moses resurrected / retranslated as Dispensationalists teach, nor Enoch & Elijah as the early church fathers taught.

<sup>5</sup> The line of kings was of Judah, while the line of priests was from Levi, thus they could not combine. When Christ comes as God's true High Priest and glorious king, there is instituted a new order. The old covenant is cancelled and the new covenant is instituted in Christ's blood. The throne is now heavenly and not the shadow of a human kingship; just as the foundational quality of Christ's priesthood depends on eternal life. See the argument of the book of Hebrews which expounds this theme under the typology of Melchizedek.

<b>Revelation 11</b>	
Two witnesses that prophesy	God's testimony, declaring God's word. The prophetic office of Christ mediated through the church.
Two olive trees	God's people - the elect, the church, empowered and replenished by the Spirit. From Zechariah (to which John alludes) we see a reference to the priestly and kingly offices of Christ.
Two lampstands	The church reflecting the light of God and the testimony of Christ. [One lampstand in Zech 4; i.e. a change has occurred; the OT church now fulfilled in the NT church, combined testimony of OT and NT.]
All together they represent -	The church in the fulness of testimony reflecting the offices of Christ as priest, prophet and king.
1260 days	The Gospel age since the cross.
Fire	God's holiness
Water	God's word
Drought	Famine of God's word during apostasy, withdrawal of grace.
Blood	Death
Water into blood	First plague of Egypt; it refers to death as judgment for rejecting God's word.
The vision speaks of the testimony of the end-time church indwelt by Christ.	

<b>Zechariah 4</b>	
Pointing forward to the spiritual reality of the NT dispensation	
Golden lampstand with a bowl and seven lamps, seven pipes to the lamps.	The church as the outshining of God's testimony in spiritual light. 7 = perfection of testimony.
Two olive trees each side of the lampstand supplying oil to the lamps = the two anointed ones standing by the Lord.	The church, represented by Joshua the High Priest and Zerubbabel the prince of David's line. The Spirit supplies the power to shine forth God's testimony. [Only priests and kings were anointed. Christ is the only anointed priest/king.] = John's two witnesses.
The vision speaks of the testimony of the church indwelt by Christ.	

### **Latter rain**

Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See *how* the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. (Jm 5:7)

I am reluctant to mention this as a result of the serious heresies that are promoted by Pentecostals on this subject.<sup>6</sup> However, there is a clear principle being taught here.

James is encouraging his readers to patient endurance because the Second Coming is not imminent. Palestinian farmers needed to rely upon the early rains which come in October /

<sup>6</sup> *Latter Rain* is a branch of Pentecostalism that appeared in the late 1940s in the US which was condemned even by Pentecostals themselves (it was formally outlawed by the Assemblies of God Church). It originally featured such heretics as William Branham and Franklin Hall; but the greater danger is the widespread acceptance of its crazy ideas by the modern Charismatic Movement, which is now largely a vehicle for Latter rain teachings. The Signs and Wonders Mvt. was a keystone for such ideas, seen particularly in the ministries of Paul Cain and Bob Jones, both now discredited. One foolish idea was that end-time believers would be invulnerable to bullets, able to fly and could walk through walls.

November, which assisted the germination of the seed. They then had to wait and hope for the latter rain that come between March and May for the ripening of the crop. The climate and the arid conditions of the soil meant that farmers depended on these two bouts of rain for a good harvest.

Now we cannot press this image too far; there is a simple point to make. The seed requires a bout of heavy, sustained rain at the beginning for the crop to germinate. Following this there is little rainfall throughout the winter. After this drought, there is a further burst of heavy rain that enables the produce to develop and grow to fulness. After this, the crop continues to ripen until harvest sometime later.

We cannot draw detailed spiritual conclusions from this and certainly can't suggest highly speculative notions or discuss time frames for the church. What we can do is say that James implies that there is a burst of growth due to divine supply at the beginning of church history, followed by a final burst of special growth towards the end of church history. Both these times of revival are necessary before the Lord returns and believers need to be patient.

Early church history clearly evidences the power of the Spirit coming as the former or early rain; but James is suggesting that there is a later period of special activity by the Spirit to ripen the church before the harvest. Exactly what this ripening is we cannot say; but what is certain is that there is a special move of God towards the end of church history.

If key moments in church history are to be considered as revivals, heavenly showers of divine empowering, such as The Reformation or The Great Evangelical Awakening, then the final bout of rain must be greater in power than these.

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We could pursue this further, but the point is made. At the end of the age God will have a complete and full testimony to his glory in the church. This does not mean a fleshly power as Charismatics teach. It does not mean dominating human governments as Dominionists teach. It does not necessarily mean a global revival with millions of people suddenly being saved as many hope for. But it means that there will be a purity of testimony in the church, a big influx of converts, and a return to the sort of glory that we see in the early church. There will be persecution on the one hand, and the world triumphing in wickedness; but there will be a quiet, humble, underground powerful witness to the truth of Christ's Gospel that will be manifested through Biblical churches meeting in homes and holding the truth in love.

The end is a time of contrasts; a fulness of evil as the world becomes more conformed to the devil, and a fulness of God's testimony in the church. The wheat and the tares both come to maturity before the harvest when they are separated forever.

## Progress through church history

### Introduction

I am trying to establish a specific point in here, that for most of church history the soul of man has been the dominating feature, rather than the Spirit of God. This means I have to begin by defending two points.

The first is theological; that man's soul is a distinct organ from his spirit. I really cannot develop this in detail as it would occupy too much space and have done so in various other places. Suffice to say here that scripture identifies a distinction:

**For the word of God *is* living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit ... and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Heb 4:12)**

**Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Thess 5:23)**

Without entering into a long argument, the Bible clearly identifies a difference between soul and spirit in these two places. We are specifically told that the word of God separates these two organs. This means that there is an organ that functions spiritually in man, which communes with God directly, and there is an organ that is the executor of life, with which man communes with the world. The soul, comprising of intellect, will and emotion is the real person, is where man's character is set. This is the engine room of personality and is what makes man who he is.<sup>7</sup>

The soul is not the spirit. Religion that is merely soulish is human and fleshly. Where emotionalism, volition (or control) and intellectualism rule the church, there is not a spiritual testimony but a human one, not matter how good this may appear to be. A godly testimony is seen in a man when the Holy Spirit controls his soul; in other words, the man is dependent upon God and does his will. His personality is submitted to the Lord.

This same process can be seen in churches. Where the leadership is Biblical and submitted to God, there is a spiritual, godly testimony. Where the leadership dominates we see a variety of fleshly, human traits such as: subjective emotionalism, human manipulation and control or intellectualism. People that favour certain aspects gather together, so we see streams that feature subjective, superficial emotionalism (such as the Charismatic Movement), denominations that focus upon intellectualism (such as certain Reformed church groups) or groups that express the wilful control of leaders (such as the Word Faith Movement). Such characteristics can be observed in history.

The second point is that this evaluation of church history is necessarily rather arbitrary and superficial of necessity. I am making a simple point as an exhortation, I am not writing an analytical, academic dissertation. However, I believe that there is good evidence for the general point I am making.

I am not saying that there are clearly defined points in church history where the following features manifest themselves; that the church moved from one form to another at a given year. All these characteristics were being manifest together from the beginning in various aberrant groups. There have also been fine churches that did not express these problems throughout history.

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<sup>7</sup> It's not the root of personality but the engine room. The root is the heart, out of which flow the issues of life (Prov 4:23). The soul is the executor of the heart's wishes and transmits this to the world. That is why the separation of soul and spirit reaches the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4).

Yet the point still holds that, in very general terms, there have been these expressions of the human soul dominating the church for 2,000 years, and during certain centuries, certain aspects were more dominant. At this very time, all these expressions are being manifest, but by different denominations. The Charismatics tend to depend upon emotionalism; Reformed churches are very intellectual while certain movements are very controlling.

If history students will forgive me and bear with my poor efforts here, I think there is a point worth making.

### **The early church experiences the power of the Spirit**

No one would question that early church history manifested the power of the Spirit in great measure. There were various reasons for this.

The first is that the church needed to be established. There were relatively few disciples after Jesus ascended to heaven and much work to be done. This required the power of God to break down strongholds and empower Gospel preaching. In the world's eyes, this was a new religion competing with the very many sects that were springing up at the time, as well as long established religions. For intellectuals there were the Greek philosophies of Stoicism, Epicureanism and Platonism. For Roman soldiers there was Mithraism. Many Mediterranean people still followed the religions of the Greek gods, such as Diana (Artemis) worship as Paul learned in Ephesus. The religious rites surrounding Dionysus (Bacchus) worship were also popular. In the East, Zoroastrianism was widely followed, especially in Persia where it began. Then there was Emperor worship required of Roman citizens later on. In the late 1<sup>st</sup> century Gnosticism was making great headway, and later combining with various occult sects, such as the Hermeticism of Egypt. We could add more, but this is enough. God empowered the witness of the early church to break through this miasma of lies.

Secondly, there was the ministry of the apostles and other followers of Jesus. These worked to great effect, being blessed with signs and wonders following their words.

**So great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? (Heb 2:3-4)**

But perhaps most important was the fact that very few believers would have had any portions of scripture. Many converts were slaves who would not even have owned paper, while many probably could not read. Manuscripts of the Old Testament would have to be hand-copied on bulky, expensive scrolls of vellum and hardly anyone would have had all the OT books. Copies of collections of Jesus' sayings and apostolic letters would have been eagerly passed around, but owned by few. In this situation the Lord ensured that the church was blessed with powerful and genuine supernatural, revelatory, spiritual gifts. Prophecy was a means of encouraging and directing the Lord's people. Evangelists witnessed with great power. Apostles planted churches with great wisdom. Tongues and interpretation edified ordinary folk. Miracles added credibility to the Christian proclamations of Christ.

For these (and other) reasons the early church was explosive in its testimony. It was empowered by the Spirit to break through the hold of false religion and establish the foundation of the church in truth. Within a few decades, the whole Mediterranean world was turned upside down and in 300 years Christianity was adopted as the state religion

(this was a disaster by the way).<sup>8</sup> In 33 AD no secular historian or social commentator could have predicted this turn of events.

The development and influence of the early church was a result of the work of the Holy Spirit guiding, empowering and establishing people under God's hand.

### **The testimony of will**

Very early in church history, after the death of the apostles, the church began to be manipulated by men. In the first three to four hundred years we see two main movements in the church. The first is the defence of Christian theology against a variety of errors, comprising of attacks on the doctrine of God, on the Lord Jesus, on the church and on salvation. Various church councils were convened to formally agree the progress of systematic theology to confront heresy; though there were times when it seemed touch and go, such as when Athanasius stood alone to confront Arianism. The other movement is the gradual coalescing of power into the hands of certain local church leadership officers and the struggle for the global control of the church by certain metropolitan offices. Alexandria, Antioch and Rome vied with each other to be the supreme head of the church, with Rome becoming victorious.

Meanwhile, the local churches had succumbed to the rule of monarchical bishops and formal local officers by the 4<sup>th</sup> century - the church had been unbiblically split into functioning paid clergy and dormant laity. This meant that church members were subordinate to various ranks of men, from an area bishop, a local bishop, down through a priest, presbyter (elder) and sometimes others [such as deacons; the Orthodox Church also had archbishops and patriarchs].

This was done for the most laudable of reasons (human wisdom again). Ignatius of Antioch (d. 108) felt that a formal leadership rank was necessary to constitute a visible centre of church unity in the face of the threat of heresy. Irenaeus (b. 130) saw bishops as the necessary continuation of apostolic authority, while Cyprian (b. 200) went further; for him the bishop became the absolute vice-regent of Christ, with complete authority over church members and other leaders.

What this all means is that the church was in subjection to the rule of men. The will of man was the dominating feature of church life. At its worst, this resulted in people being killed for their beliefs, usually evangelical people who had threatened the ruling class with their Biblical teaching.

Perhaps the Dark Ages is the most clearly defined era of the testimony of wilful manipulation of the church by men. In this time the Roman Church became supremely powerful for the most part, able to subjugate and even humiliate kings.<sup>9</sup> This period is one historical counterpart of the prophecy that the court of the temple would be trod under the feet of men. The papacy had soon degenerated into a political tool with popes becoming the

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<sup>8</sup> The Edict of Milan in 313 AD where Constantine and Licinius (controller of the Eastern Empire) ended Christian persecution, gave freedom of Christian worship, Christians were compensation for confiscated property and Constantine later reigned as a 'Christian' emperor. It thus became fashionable for people in society to mimic the Emperor and claim to be Christians and large buildings were given over to become churches in major towns.

<sup>9</sup> Such as when Pope Gregory VII forced Emperor Henry IV of Germany to wait barefoot in the snow for three days for forgiveness in 1077.

focus of political intrigue by powerful families, such as the de' Medici.<sup>10</sup> By the Middle Ages is virtually existed as a separate political entity within Europe.

The power of the papacy was put into full gear to dominate free speech and thought, whether it was the astronomical discoveries of a scientist like Galileo or the evangelical preaching of the thousands of believers tortured and killed by the papal inquisition. Until the Reformation, ordinary people had no access to a Bible, and couldn't read one anyway unless they could understand Latin; this ensured the blindness of church members to God's truth that would threaten the status quo. Total submission to papal decisions, worked out through a priestly hierarchy, was demanded of all from kings to paupers, and most willingly complied. Denial of the legitimacy of the mass was enough to result in the death of many men, women and children - mostly believers, but also some Gnostic groups.

This is domination of the church by men, but it doesn't end with the Roman Church; many groups in history have developed authoritarian practices, even some that started out as evangelical. To this day many churches, para-church organisations, and maverick preachers manipulate believers by their will. Some leaders dominate every aspect of their subjects' personal lives, demanding unthinking loyalty to any decision; while others simply fleece the flock of money through suggestibility and subjective control of meetings.

In the worst cases even believers seem to lose the power of independent thinking. They only listen to their leaders, only read what their group endorses and only watch what their church condones. The reading of books by others is condemned while meeting believers of other denominations is discouraged. People in such works tend to be isolated and elitist, revelling in tunnel vision. There are very many in such circumstances in these days, especially within the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements.

Some groups, where the strong willpower of leaders dominates, claim to be successful, big and are therefore a powerful testimony to God. But large numbers prove nothing. There are millions of Hinduists but that doesn't mean that Hinduism is correct. Big meetings are meaningless if they are not submitted to God. Neither is the pervasiveness of their message on television, or marketed through DVDs, CDs and books, any guarantee of approval by the Lord. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses are successful, generating millions of dollars of revenue, but their message is an error.

Throughout church history we have seen the deplorable effects and terrible damage caused to innocent people by domination through man's will. Sadly, the church can be an effective vehicle for strong-willed men and such control is common. Indeed it takes considerable spiritual discipline for any leader to allow this temptation to pass him by.

Unfortunately, many conservative churches unwittingly fall into this trap. Where there is a senior pastor / minister figure, especially if there is no balance of other elders equal in authority, there is the danger of members submitting to the will of a man in the belief that they are obeying the will of God, fearful of rebellion.

This is one of the soulish manifestations of church manipulation by men in history. Far too often works have degenerated into being a reflection of the will-power of some man instead of the will of God.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Leo X - the second son of Lorenzo de' Medici and his cousin Giulio di Giuliano de' Medici, who became Pope Clement VII. Leo is supposed to have said, *'How well we know what a profitable superstition this fable of Christ has been for us'*, though this is actually derived from a Protestant parody play written by John Bale called, *The Pageant of the Popes*. It aptly, however, sums up Leo's godless character.

### **The testimony of emotion**

Subjective and emotional religion has an equally long history. As there is an inbuilt desire in man to worship, so there is a natural tendency towards mysticism or legalism if the flesh is not kept in check. The essence of mysticism is to rely upon subjective feelings instead of God's word. These feelings can be trained, by various disciplines, to be very sensitive and give every appearance that the soul is hearing directly from God. In fact it is the deep recesses of the imagination normally locked away by social strictures, or at worst is inspired by demonic manipulation and devilish temptation.

Genuine religion involves a balance of the three aspects of the soul: the intellect informs the mind on the basis of God's word, the emotions are stirred as a result of genuine worship and communion while the will disciplines the person to behave in strict accordance with God's revealed instructions. Emotional religion is where the balance is disturbed and subjectivity overrides the others.

Emotional subjectivity will concentrate upon what the soul substitutes for communion with God, while deceiving the person that it is God. Thus there will be much concentration upon felt words of direction, false spiritual gifts, exercises that promote passivity (to empty the mind of distracting thoughts), anti-intellectualism, a focus on prophecy or mystical exercises to stimulate holy thoughts. In extreme cases there can be abandonment of the Bible, asceticism, fasting of various sorts, celibacy, sexual abandonment or fleshly hedonism. The soul is given over to what is felt, rather than faith in what God says.

In church history errors of this sort have been evidenced from the beginning. The Gnostics (a generic term for many sects) focused upon a mystical initiation into a felt religion, which involved either asceticism, or sometimes excess, to receive 'true' knowledge. It was a mystery religion, the initiates had the 'true' knowledge but everyone else was an outsider and uninitiated. As dualists, believing that matter was evil and spiritual things good, they used rigorous disciplines to feel that the evil body was under control. For many in the second century, their subjectivity descended into practising magic.

The various errors and aberrations of the Gnostic sects continued in the mystical practices of various groups throughout church history to this day. Much of the mysticism evidenced in the Charismatic Movement can be traced back to one Gnostic error or another.

We have no time here to trace the many mystical groups, which flowered especially in the Middle Ages, but various church groups have fallen foul of an emotionalism less severe than outright mysticism. From the Reformation onwards, certain emotional extremists were called 'enthusiasts', which parallels the subjective Charismaticism of today. In some cases this zealous emotionalism led to a millennial fever<sup>11</sup> followed by complete abandonment. Such was the case at Munster,<sup>12</sup> which shocked and worried the political establishment and the reformers.

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<sup>11</sup> A belief that the normal world was coming to an imminent end and a golden age (a millennium, or 1,000 years) was about to begin.

<sup>12</sup> The town was taken over by extreme elements of the Anabaptists who set up a primitive communism in 1533 that was supposedly theocratic and led by self-proclaimed prophet. Lawlessness ensued. The authorities were forced to take the city by storm.

Pietism<sup>13</sup> and Quietism<sup>14</sup> were reactions against the perception of academic intellectualism in Post Reformation scholasticism. Whilst there were good elements in them, the natural movement was towards emotionalism and mysticism. In their train came the Quakers<sup>15</sup> which was extremely subjective religion. Meetings would wait in silence until someone felt the inner light move them to do something; there are documented cases where this movement was utterly Satanic.<sup>16</sup> From Quakerism came the Shakers, an appallingly antinomian, blasphemous, mystical and occult sect that was given over to complete emotional subjectivity. It was a short step, via Methodism and the Holiness movement, to Pentecostalism and thence the Charismatic Movement where many of these features found a foothold.

It is in Charismatic churches that emotionalism takes full hold. While OT saints could worship God leaning on a staff in silence, Charismatic worshippers require repetitive chorus singing, loud music from folk-rock bands, peer pressure, emotional manipulation by a worship leader, highly charged preaching and spurious spiritual gifts. Some groups include dancing, marching, shouting, leaping and other extravagances. Such folk feel that listening to a 'worship' CD is true worship, even if they are busy ironing, just because they have warm feelings. Emotionalism has replaced true submissive piety.

All this is mere souliness. While many sense something they believe to be God in their trances or passivity, it is really the over-stimulated soul that is feeding these feelings and prompting a counterfeit spirituality. The feelings stimulate and feed the ego rather than direct the heart to fresh submitted service to God.

Now I am not wishing to tarnish everyone in the groups mentioned with the same brush. There have been godly people in most of them; some groups, such as the Pietists led by Count Von Zinzendorf (founder of the Moravian Brethren), did much good in promoting mission and good works. I am making broad sweeps across history here and making simple points about souliness religion. The points stand. Emotionalism is unbalanced Christianity and is a substitute for true spiritual piety. Such subjective religion has been much in evidence in history and is common today.

### **The testimony of intellect**

The use of the intellect is a necessary part of true religion. The mind is meant to be exercised, in the fear of God, to systematise and investigate God's word in order that believers can be helped through solid teaching. However, as one-third of the soul, it must not be over-emphasised at the expense of the emotions and volition. Dry, academic, head knowledge is no servant of God, but merely fleshly intellectualism. Just as the flesh can be pampered by emotionalism and will-power, so it can be fed by intellectualism that isn't based on spiritual knowledge. This becomes merely human rationalism, philosophy, logic or even sophistry.

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<sup>13</sup> A mid 17<sup>th</sup> century movement that began in Germany originally to promote true piety and avoid lukewarm formal religion.

<sup>14</sup> A 17<sup>th</sup> century sect based on absolute rest and inaction, to enable the soul to achieve a state of submissive perfection employed in contemplating God, which they called the unitive life.

<sup>15</sup> Another 17<sup>th</sup> century sect which spread rapidly in Europe and the US. Founded by George Fox it was called the Society of Friends, but named *Quakers* by their enemies due to their movements when the 'Spirit' came upon them.

<sup>16</sup> See for example the case of a meeting which Alexander Peden visited, described in Howie's *The Scot's Worthies*.

There have been many times when the intellect reigned powerfully in church life. For instance in the times of the church fathers, medieval scholasticism and even Reformed scholasticism. A modern example would be Victorian Sandemanianism that made faith an intellectual issue.<sup>17</sup> This often happens when men trained to be lawyers become theologians. Now some lawyer-cum-theologians are eminently spiritual men; such was John Calvin whose writings, while systematic, breathe a submissive, godly spirit. Some of his followers, while still good men, became more dry and rational.

A belief that the Reformation had become too intellectual led to the development of Pietism and Quietism. However, the worst expression of sheer logical rationality was evidenced by the scholastics, of which it is said that they wasted time discussing such nonsense as how many angels could dance on the head of a needle.

Intellectual works that feed the spirit will do you good, but works that only stimulate the brain tend to puff people up. The last hundred years has seen an explosion in the availability of solid doctrinal and theological works; in print, on the Internet and as CD ROMS. Actually I applaud this and have a well-stocked library, but there needs to be a note of caution. This same period has seen possibly the worst degeneration of godliness and the testimony of the church in all history. There are more heresies and aberrations abounding in the supposed evangelical churches than at any other time. The benefit of the availability of good teaching has been wasted and intellectual works can't guarantee godliness.

Yet so many conservative people base their church experience on a preacher. People travel miles to go to a favoured preacher, even if they drive past several sound churches on the way. The preacher dominates church life and usually does all the speaking in services. This is the very opposite of what New Testament ecclesiastical life consisted of, which was mutual edification and shared ministry surrounding the breaking of bread. The focus for such folk is one man's intellectual character, no matter how sound he is in theology.

As with other aspects of the soul, a church centred on the intellect alone is unbalanced and will tend towards a fleshly testimony. The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, but the truth is not just manifested by the mind. The truth is Christ himself, and he is expressed by rational speech, loving actions and zealous determination; in other words, the whole soul of man not just the intellect. Just as church members should not merely sit and be entertained by an emotional jamboree, neither should they sit in silence being entertained by their favoured preacher. Neither scenario represents a true experience of the *ekklesia*, which is properly manifested by the whole church being active under the sovereignty of God. Multiple ministry will involve the emotions, intellect and will.

### **End-time testimony to be of the Spirit**

This is the key to the end-time expression of the church. The Biblical truth about church life, long dormant, will be aroused and will result in an underground church movement that will be sustained through the torrent of antichristian persecution that is certain to arise. Current church structures will not survive unless they compromise to totalitarian standards.

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<sup>17</sup> The sect originated in Scotland in 1728 by John Glas who was expelled from the church of Scotland, and was developed by Robert Sandeman [1718-1771], son in law of Glas, (both claimed to be high Calvinists). Scientist Michael Faraday was a member of the sect which flourished from 1725-1900. Martyn Lloyd-Jones could say in 1967 that Sandemanianism was '*one of the main problems before us at the present time*' which affected Calvinists and Arminians (Puritan and Westminster Conference address).

The church cannot thrive on the ministry of just one man, no matter how good this man is. The local church was designed by God to be led by the Spirit through a team of equal elders who lead the members to manifest their gifts under the control of the Holy Spirit. This is clear apostolic teaching, though much ignored.

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. **But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*:** for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another *different* kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also *is* Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not of the body," is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body *were* an eye, where *would be* the hearing? If the whole *were* hearing, where *would be* the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased. And if they *were* all one member, where *would* the body *be*? But now indeed *there are* many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those *members* of the body which we think to be less honourable, on these we bestow greater honour; and our unpresentable *parts* have greater modesty, but our presentable *parts* have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honour to that *part* which lacks it.

(1 Cor 12:4-24)

Though often disregarded, this passage is clear: the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit *of all*: everyone has a part to play, not just one man. This is why when the church is gathered, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification (1 Cor 14:26). One gift will be more intellectual, another more emotional, another an exhortation of will. All sorts are necessary as the Spirit leads. This does not result in chaos, as often charged (how often have such critics been to such a meeting to know?); it is the job of elders to ensure that this does not occur. The many examples of indecency and disorder in recent decades have been in Charismatic churches where there is an authoritarian leadership and dormant laity, not in house churches practising body ministry.

If the Holy Spirit is to lead a time of fulness at the end, of maturity in church experience, then he will do so on Biblical grounds. This means that NT teaching on church principles will become a living expression. One-man ministry and hymn sandwiches will go. True mutual edification and *koinonia* will appear. Church buildings will be abandoned, but multiple churches will arise meeting in homes. The sermon as the focus of church life will be replaced by the Lord's Supper as the church centres on Christ crucified. Solid teaching, in a didactic/discussion format can occupy a separate evening so that more time is given to sound teaching.

The church will also reach out in Biblical evangelism to friends, family and neighbours in a fresh way. The idea of dragging unwilling outsiders to special church services will be dropped. Then there is no need to revamp these gospel services with man-based, seeker sensitive activities, or any other methodology, because the gospel is taken outside to where the people are. Credibility for this message will be enhanced by good works that the local

church performs to the wider community. Money for these good works is available because no one has to support building structures or full-time ministers, most elders should be able to work and shepherd the flock if there is a good team. It also means that the needy within the church are always supported as deacons ensure that money is available under the Lord's direction.

In this time of fulness there will be many conversions. This is easily catered for as more house churches spring up to meet the need. The idea of one man controlling a bigger and bigger empire will be obsolete. This will not simply be due to the move of the Spirit in the church, but the coming totalitarian government wouldn't allow it. The social and political developments under an antichristian, authoritarian government will actually force the church into adopting Biblical strategies. God's way will be the only way. If today's leaders do not start to adopt Biblical practices now, they will one day be forced to by the ruling powers.

So, the end-time church grows and matures on Biblical principles that have been largely ignored by sincere, but mistaken, men for 2,000 years. As these principles are obeyed implicitly under the hand of the Spirit, the church grows its own ministries and grows by the addition of converts, and later by multiplication of converts. In Biblical churches these converts quickly mature to be effective ministers themselves, and so the church moves forward rapidly.

When this is in full sway, I believe that it will not take many years for the church to fulfil its mission of converting the last elect member. Then the Lord will return. This is the glorious future for the body of Christ at the end.

<b>Early Church - A Spiritual Testimony in Suffering</b>
<b>Gospel Age Church - a focus upon man:</b>
<i>Expression of man's will</i> - church subjected to human institutions and leaders.
<i>Expression of human emotions</i> - superstition, mysticism, superficiality, outward forms.
<i>Expression of man's intellect</i> - elevation of reason, logic, intellect.
<b>End-Time Church - A Spiritual Testimony in Suffering</b>

### **What about revivals?**

A valid question is that, surely the occurrence of various revivals shows that God has consistently, throughout church history, acted in the church by his Spirit to reveal his power and glory? History is merely the continuation of revival, followed by a day of small things over and over until the end. There are no other patterns.

Firstly, the concept of revival is open to many questions. It is undeniable that there have been several occasions when God sovereignly poured out his Spirit to bring the church to immediate repentance, inculcated a new sanctified spirit and brought many local folk to conversion. The Reformation could be considered as a global and powerful application of revival. The Great Awakening in the US would be another large-scale revival while the outpouring in Dundee under Murray M'Cheyne is an example of a genuine localised work

that sent ripples through Scotland. Another powerful localised work would be the Shetland revival.

However, there are many claimants to revival where a close inspection of contemporary records reveals that there was a great deal wrong with the work. In many cases it seems hasty to call such events 'revival'. Some people consider that church history can be written as one long series of revivals, but this is very unwise if we do not have access to the whole truth. For instance, there are grave questions over the 1859 Ulster revival while the Azusa Street 'revival', that catapulted the Pentecostal Movement, is full of very shocking incidents, serious aberrations, a host of heretical teachings and cannot be considered a genuine revival in any sense.

Secondly, enough remains to testify that, at the times of God's choosing, the church has been blessed with an unusual supply of grace and spiritual power. These serve to encourage the church to patient endurance and also to ensure that works do not die out completely. The Lord is keeping the hope of the church alive by using these revivals as a spur to press on in patience for the great outpouring that will accompany the end-time testimony of the church.

Revivals add weight to my argument. The church began in revival and will end in revival. In between there have been occasional outpourings to encourage the Lord's people to endure, but the fulness of God's Spirit working in the church has not yet been experienced.

As in the early church, great power does not necessarily mean an easy life. Christians will not be invulnerable to face the end time assault of persecution that is certain to come (as certain Charismatics claim). The early church was powerful in its witness in the face of great hardship, suffering and persecution. There is no reason to believe that the end-time flowering will be any different.

### **Conclusion**

Remember that my point here is to highlight that much of church history has evidenced the soul of man rather than the work of the Spirit in churches. The reason for much of this has been the lack of Biblicity in the way churches are structured.

Where churches are geared towards a man in structure, the obvious effect is that they will elevate men above the work of God, even if they do not mean to. When a man dominates the church by doing all the ministry and standing alone at the front, the work is man-centred. That is a sheer fact, no matter how godly the man is. When the sermon takes first place rather than breaking bread (which is the Biblical reason for gathering) then man has become the focus. When the poor and needy in the church and outside are not helped because all the church's money goes to paying an unbiblical salary to a man without an itinerant ministry, the church's testimony is skewed.

Concentrating attention on men is the bane of church life and helps to generate soulish religion. The end-time church will switch this focus from man to God in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It will be dependent upon the Spirit for resources and ministry and will enable all members to function in the way that God has gifted them; no one person dominates.

As the early church was a spiritual expression of God's testimony, so the end-time church will manifest a godly and dependent spirit, anxious to avoid being reliant upon men, even good men. The time for soulish church life must end, whether it is the emotionalism of

subjective feelings, the domination of authoritarian leaders or the intellectualism of dry teaching without the Spirit. The time has come for a true expression of the church to be seen, a manifestation of the glory of God through the spiritual life of all church members.

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