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THE URBAN CHURCH

ANTIOCH



Pastor Dr. T. Valson Abraham
 Founder/President
 India Gospel Outreach

President
 India Bible College and Seminary
 President
 India Pentecostal Church of God

THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIAN UNITY

Christian unity is one of the most desired-and most misunderstood-qualities of the church.

In John 17, Jesus prays for unity among His disciples and those who would hear their preaching (that includes you and me). What did He actually pray for?

He did not pray for a one-world church under one leader. He did not pray for a uniform set of external standards followed by all who call themselves “Christians.” He did not pray for unanimity on every single doctrinal point taught in Christian churches. He did not pray for an indefinable “something” that would take place in some distant, unforeseeable future.

These are what most people (including many Christians) assume when they hear of “Christian unity.” Actually, Jesus prayed for something much more profound, powerful - and simple.

Christian unity began that night in the Upper Room. Jesus’ prayer activated Christian unity, not just for the distant future but in the moment He prayed. His prayer stated the eternal plan of God about to be fulfilled a few hours later on the cross. You and I, as brothers and sisters in Christ, are recipients of that eternal plan.

In essence, Christian unity is the life we share with one another through the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. This life began and has come down to us through the preaching of the apostles who were with Jesus that night He prayed. This life is activated through the Holy Spirit. Whatever our differences in time, background and experience, we all share the permanent presence of God in our lives because of the cross. We each have the same Holy Spirit. We each have the opportunity to grow and mature in Christ and express it through the fruit of His Spirit.

As believers, we share the reality of being chosen by Him before the foundation of the world. Each of us is loved by the Father even as He loved Jesus the Son. Each of us grows in that love so we are better able to love one another.

We all share God’s love and the foundation for love of one another. We share His mission, whatever our racial, cultural, generational and economic differences. We possess different gifts and callings, we come from different times and places, but we all have the same Spirit who uses these different gifts for the same purpose - to glorify God and bless others.

Many times, we don’t express unity very well, but from the moment Jesus prayed His prayer in John 17, we gained that potential.

Because of God’s initiative of love through Jesus Christ, unity is not some elusive “something” we strive for but “Someone” we already have and need to know better.

Christian unity takes place when we begin to practice what God has already given to us. Christian unity takes place when we as believers in Jesus Christ act as if His Spirit already lives within us, and that He is always eager to reveal Himself through us by the fruits and gifts of His Spirit.

Before He prays over His disciples and the church in John 17, Jesus has already announced the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in John 14-16. In John 16, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will strengthen His followers even more than His physical presence (John 16:7). Christian unity results because of His Spirit’s presence.

Therefore, when Jesus prays in John 17, He does not introduce unity as an isolated topic but as the practical and vital outcome of what will happen through the Holy Spirit whom He has already described in chapters 14-16. Christian unity is not something we do but rather what He does through us - when we let Him.

God is glorified when we bear much fruit (John 15:8), that is, to show unity with one another. The visible manifestation of Christian unity is a sure sign to the world of His continual presence in His church.

When this unity does not appear visibly, it is because we have prevented it. Whenever we judge a fellow believer, or whenever we fail to forgive him/her, we judge that person on the basis of outward things, though the Spirit of God dwells in both of us. When we do this, we “quench the Spirit.” To quench the Spirit means to silence the Spirit. We prevent the Holy Spirit from speaking and working through our lives because of false notions and unbelief.

Right now, unity does not seem apparent to many because of the church’s many thousands of denominations. Many Christians become embarrassed and discouraged by this, but like Charles Spurgeon indicated, this is because we have focused on “the rough shell of the clam while forgetting the pearl inside”. That “pearl” of unity is above all else, an inward work of the Spirit, not an outward thing such as church organization.

The more we realize that the essence of unity is already ours through the finished work of Christ and the continual presence of His Spirit within us, we will love Him more and love each other more. The barriers that divide us will begin to crumble, and the world will begin to see unity in action.

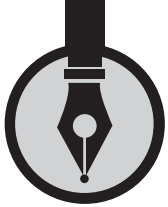
Let us pray daily that God will revive us and re-awaken us to the Truth we too often forget—His continual presence in each of us who is His child. The enemy works day and night to blind us to who and what we already are and have in Him so as to deny God His rightful glory. Let us disappoint the devil as we pray for our own revival!

When we pray for revival, He will answer, and we will also see His Spirit poured out upon many others who still await and long for the Truth, and for the unity for which Jesus prayed.

Father God, thank you for laying the foundation for unity through the finished work of your Son, Jesus Christ, and the work of your Holy Spirit. Help me to better practice your presence and put these wonderful truths to work in my life that I may love you more and love my brothers and sisters more. Send a great revival to your church that breaks down barriers of judgment and unforgiveness, and testifies to the world of your glory and power. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.



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JUNE THOMAS

ANN ABRAHAM

PUBLISHER & PRINTER

Lt. Col. V. I. LUKE (Retd.)

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DESIGN

Beam Design S2dio

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beamfine@gmail.com**POSTAL ADDRESS**

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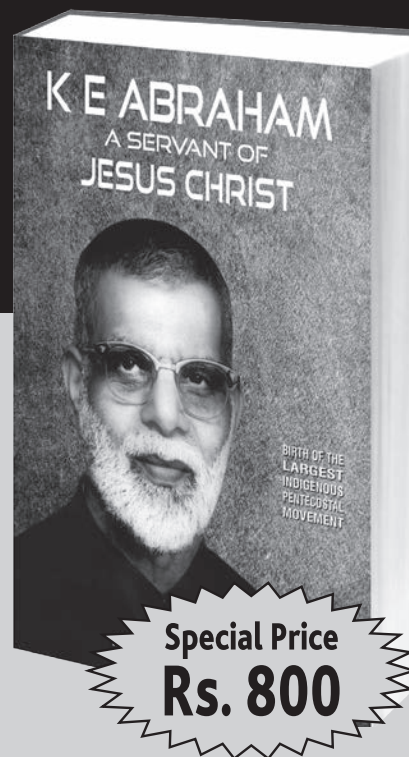
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Pastor Dr. John K. Mathew

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Antioch was the third-largest city in the Roman Empire. So many cities are referred to in the Scriptures. Each town has its distinctive characteristics.

Jerusalem is considered as a sacred city. However, no city on the entire planet has witnessed as much violence over such a long period as Jerusalem. Jesus often traveled to Jerusalem to worship at the temple on religious holidays. But it is so sad to see that he was killed there.

While he was alive our Lord Jesus Christ cried over Jerusalem. It reads in the Gospel of Luke "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing". Sodom and Gomorrah were two neighboring cities that grew wicked. Nineveh was an evil city but they later repented upon the message of Jonah.

Whatever, Antioch was different. So was the Antiochian church. Here is where believers were first called, 'Christians.'

The Antiochian church was a worshipping church. Fasting and prayer were important ingredients in their spiritual activities.

It was a sending church, and giving was a hearty habit of the believers there.

Above all, it was a multicultural church. Luke records it in the following words." Now in the church at Antioch, there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, (who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch), and Saul. They all were in one accord.

What a meaningful ministry model. Our society is becoming more and more multicultural. Urbanization is a reality. The church has to be a melting pot where every language and people group can come and worship God with dignity and equality with no discrimination. The Antioch church set an example before us almost two thousand years ago. The church of Jesus Christ is the place where we can practice unity in diversity. ●



THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT IN ESTABLISHING AN ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY AT ANTIOCH



Dr. JOSE L.

Academic Dean,
India Bible College and
Seminary, Kumbanad

Luke's second volume, 'The Acts of the Apostles' is also called 'The Acts of the Holy Spirit' because it recognises the role of the Spirit in the formation of ecclesial communities as well as the spread of the gospel in the length and breadth of the Greco-Roman world. Luke's major interest in writing the book of Acts is to narrate the birth and growth of the church through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit empowered the apostles as well as the unnamed disciples to form ecclesial communities in Jerusalem, Samaria, Caesarea, Antioch, and to the ends of the world (Ac.1:8).

Luke beautifully portrays that the Spirit is the director and the empowerment for the gospel mission (Ac. 4:31; 5:1-10; 6:10; 8:9-13). The Spirit leads and guides the missionaries to new areas for the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Ac. 8:29, 39; 10:19; 11:12; 13:2, 4; 16:6-7). In this ministerial expansion, visions and prophecies evidently played a significant role (Ac. 9:10; 10:3, 7; 10-16; 16:9f; 22:17f).

From the day of Pentecost, the Jerusalem ecclesia engages in mission through inspired speech and witness as well as through visions and dreams. In God's mission, it is not only the apostles, the Hellenist leaders, and the gifted missionaries, but also the persecuted, ordinary, dispersed disciples played an active role in the spread of the gospel.

SETTING THE STAGE FOR GENTILE MISSION IN CAESAREA AND ANTIOCH (Ac.2:1-8:3)

The infant Christian community is formed in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost by the advent of the eschatological Spirit with universal representation (Ac. 2:9-11). The Holy Spirit helped the Galilean Jesus' community to dismantle geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries in the formation of the Jerusalem ecclesia. The



Christian movement was not only among the Jews (Ac. 2:41, 47; 6:7) but also among the Samaritans and Gentiles (Ac. 8:4–25). Since the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, the ecclesial community has turned towards the Gentiles by crossing national, gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural borders (Ac. 8:26–40).

It probably took some years to cross the borders of Judea and Samaria to enter the Gentile territories of the Greco-Roman world. In this move, the Holy Spirit played an active role through visions and dreams in taking the gospel outside of Jerusalem (Ac. 10:9–48). The circumcised Jerusalem believers were reluctant to accept the Gentile believers in the ecclesial community till the Spirit convinced them through pouring out the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles (Ac.10:44–48). It is God who took the initiative in leading the Gentiles into repentance and new life (Ac.11:1–18).

The Holy Spirit orchestrated the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Ac.8:39) before

The circumcised Jerusalem believers were reluctant to accept the Gentile believers in the ecclesial community till the Spirit convinced them through pouring out the Holy Spirit on the Gentiles (Ac.10:44–48).

the conversion of Cornelius (Ac.10–11). By the time God prepared Saul, the persecutor of the gospel, to call and commission him to preach the gospel to the Gentile world (Ac. 9:15–17), Peter was also prepared by the Spirit through visions and dreams to take the gospel to the Gentile Cornelius household (Ac. 10). A major step in the expansion of the gospel comes down in a sovereign fashion without laying hands by the apostles. 'They were amazed because the gift of the Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles' (Ac.10:45,46).

A TALE OF TWO CONVERSIONS: SETTING THE STAGE FOR THE GENTILE MISSION IN ANTIOCH (Ac.10–11)

The conversion of Gentile Cornelius in Caesarea and the conversion of Apostle Peter through visions turn the history of the Jerusalem



ecclesia into accepting the Gentiles without subscribing to the proselyte procedures (Ac.15:1-21). God answered Peter's question about clean and unclean foods through vision and dreams. Further, Peter enjoyed table fellowship with the Gentile community at Caesarea (Ac.10:48).

Acts 11 is very well connected to the work of the Holy Spirit in clearing the doubts of Peter about accepting the Gentiles into the ecclesial community. The events that take place in the lives of Apostle Peter and Cornelius are in accord with the divine plan accomplished through visions and through the angels (Ac.10:3-16, 30-33; 11:13-14).

Peter's vision made him understand the nature of God and that 'he does not show favouritism' (Ac.10:34) and the vision to Cornelius made his whole family accept the gospel and become part of the new

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Those who have been scattered from Jerusalem because of the persecution throughout the region of Judea and Samaria came up to Phoenicia, to Cyprus, and finally to Antioch (Ac.8:1; 11:19-30). The gospel reaches one of the major cities of the Roman Empire.
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community of God in Caesarea (Ac.10:44-48). Moreover, the vision of Peter made him convince the Jerusalem ecclesial community to accept the Gentiles into the church. Finally, this vision leads Peter to proclaim the gospel not only by words but also through actions by having table fellowship with 'the unclean Gentiles' (Ac.10:23, 27-28, 48; 11:3).

THE FORMATION OF THE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

The death of Stephen and the persecution of the church in Jerusalem did not stop the spread of the gospel, but they helped the formation of the Gentile ecclesia in Antioch. Those who have been scattered from Jerusalem because of the persecution throughout the region of Judea and Samaria came up to Phoenicia, to Cyprus, and finally to Antioch (Ac.8:1; 11:19-30). The gospel reaches one of the major cities of the Roman Empire.

The history of the Christian ecclesia at Antioch plays an important role in taking the gospel to the breadth and width of the Roman Empire. Antioch was the major

city in this region, the headquarters of the Roman provincial government, and the third largest city in the Roman empire next to Rome and Alexandria (JW.3.29; 276-82). The scattered community initially preached only to Jews, but there is a great progress through the unsung heroes the persecuted scattered Hellenist believers from Jerusalem.

Barnabas, a native of Cyprus and a member of the Jerusalem church held in high standing (Ac.4:36-37), was empowered by the Spirit 'full of the Holy Spirit and of faith' cause the church at Antioch to arise as a missionary church (Ac.6:5; 11:24). This church becomes the springboard for the further advance of the gospel without breaking from the movement whose center was in Jerusalem.

The church in Antioch became a mixed leadership circle, including Barnabas, Symeon, "called Niger/ black," probably ethnically of black origin, Lucius of Cyrenaica (a Roman name from north Africa, where there was a large Jewish population), and Manaen, who had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch. All are characterised as "prophets and teachers" across regional, ethnic, political, and ritual boundaries. They are instructed by God through the Spirit to designate Barnabas and Paul for the next phase of the outreach of the good news to the ends of the earth (Ac.13:1-3).

THE UNKNOWN HELLENIST CHRISTIANS CROSS THE NATIONAL-RELIGIOUS, AND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES

On the day of Pentecost, there was a geographical extension of the people of God over ethnic, cultural, social, and religious distinctions (Ac.2:5-12).

It was the Hellenist Christians, the Diaspora Jews who helped the gospel to cross over to the boarder in the midst of the exclusive nature of forcing the Gentile converts to follow the Jewish cultural practices to become part of the covenantal community (Ac.11:1-3; 15:1-5). Moreover, Hellenist

Christian leaders like Stephen wrestled with the cross-cultural issues of limiting the presence of God in the Jerusalem temple and the law (Ac.6:9-14).

Through Stephen's speech, Luke explains the theology of the Hellenist mission: God is not limited to space and time. He revealed himself to Abraham in Mesopotamia (Ac.7:2), Joseph and Jacob received the promises of deliverance from bondage in Egypt (7:9-16). God appeared

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Simultaneously, the ecclesia at Antioch became the mother church of the Gentiles, and the cosmopolitan nature of the city made the ecclesia spread the gospel into the western part of the Roman world.

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to Moses and gave him the law in the land of Sinai. God manifested his power in Egypt by defeating their army into the Red Sea, but the people of Israel rejected his leadership and offered sacrifices to idols (Ac.7:30-41).

The tabernacle, as the locus of God's presence among his people, was mobile in the wilderness and in the land (Ac.7:44-48). Stephen rhetorically argued that God's dwelling cannot be localised (Ac.7:49-

50=Isa.66:1-2) and we cannot localise the worship of God in the temple at Jerusalem.

Luke narrates the explosive mission to the nations outside Jerusalem and Judea, starting from Ac.13 through the missionary journeys of Apostle Paul. The mission to both the Jews and Gentiles in Antioch is first explained in Acts 11:19, 20. It was not the apostles and gifted evangelists and missionaries but the unnamed scattered Hellenist Christians who spread the word of God to Gentiles in Phoenicia, Antioch, Cyprus, and Cyrene (Ac.11:20). They successfully evangelised the universal community. The result was remarkable: 'a great number' joined the new fellowship (Ac.11:24). The gospel was taking root in the islands and coast of the eastern Mediterranean, from Africa to northern Syria.

Barnabas was sent by the Jerusalem church to investigate and evaluate the progress of the gospel in the Gentile world of Antioch. The Spirit enabled him to see the grace of God resting upon the new Gentile believers (Ac.11:23). The newly formed community was recognised by the general public, and they became an accepted community called 'Christians' (Ac.11:26).

Simultaneously, the ecclesia at Antioch became the mother church of the Gentiles, and the cosmopolitan nature of the city made the ecclesia spread the gospel into the western part of the Roman world. The Gentile ecclesia at Antioch recognized the gifts of Barnabas and Paul and sent them with a vision of creating ecclesial communities throughout the entire inhabited world.



THE ECCLESIAL COMMUNITY AT ANTIOCH WITNESS THROUGH FELLOWSHIP AND GENEROSITY

There are different lessons one can learn from the Gentile ecclesial community in Antioch. Luke reports a worldwide famine inflicted upon the Roman Imperial world under the reign of the Roman emperor Claudius (41-54AD) where the Gentile church in Antioch took the initiative in sending a relief to their fellow Jewish ecclesia in Jerusalem (Ac.11:27-30). The Holy Spirit helped not only with the growth of the Gentile community but also with the sustenance of the entire community.

Barnabas was called the son of encouragement (Ac.4:36). He was able to recognize the qualities in others and bring them forth for the public ecclesial ministry. He played a major role in bringing Paul from Tarsus and starting a new ministry of preaching and teaching the believers in Antioch (Ac.11:22-26).

The empowerment of the Spirit enabled the ecclesial leaders to foresee and make preparations for the future adverse situations. Prophet Agabus from Jerusalem foretold by the Holy Spirit about the famine throughout the world (Ac.11:28). So, the Antiochean ecclesia sends financial support through Barnabas and Saul for the famine-stricken believers in Jerusalem (Ac.11:30). A collection is 'gathered according to their ability' (Ac.11:29; cf.4:35).

There is diversity of witness to the gospel incorporated in the mission of the church at Antioch, and economic sharing in the time of famine is an integral part of it (Ac.11:27-30). The ecclesial community in Antioch identified their witnessing life of fellowship by becoming 'one in heart and mind' similar to the Jerusalem ecclesial

community (Ac.2: 42-47; Ac.4:32-35). God's mission is the heart of church life, and it created a new humanity in Christ.

BARNABAS: THE CHARISMATIC LEADER-FOUNDER OF THE GENTILE CHURCH AT ANTIOCH

Barnabas, the son of exhortation, a Levite from Cyprus, as 'a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith' (Ac.11:24) is a charismatic leader who proved his ability through building up an ecclesial community with Gentile mission in focus. Luke narrates the generous and selfless service of Barnabas, contrasted with the greed and hypocrisy-deceptive nature of Ananias and Sapphira (Ac.4:36-5:11). Barnabas has recognized Paul's ability and introduced him to the Antiochian church, which shows his bridge-building capacity. For a whole year, they met in the church and taught a great crowd. The followers of Jesus were first perceived to be a group distinct from the general public in Antioch called Christians (both Jews and Gentiles; Ac.11: 26; 1Pet.4:16).

THE ROLE OF BARNABAS AND PAUL IN SPREADING THE GOSPEL TO THE NATIONS

Barnabas was called the son of encouragement (Ac.4:36). He was able to recognize the qualities in others and bring them forth for the public ecclesial ministry. He played a major role in bringing Paul from Tarsus and starting a new ministry of preaching and teaching the believers in Antioch (Ac.11:22-26). Later, both Barnabas and Paul laboured at Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Ac.13:4-14:23) until Apostle Paul took the lead in the missionary journeys. Spirit-inspired prophecy was a feature of earliest Christianity (Ac.13:1; 15:32; Eph.4:11). The newly formed community was taught to participate in a community of goods so that they not only love God in abstract terms but also in concrete terms share their food with the needy believers.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The role of the unsung Hellenist heroes who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen took the gospel outside of Jerusalem. The Hellenist believers crossed the ethnic, social, cultural, and national borders of Judea-Jerusalem to communicate the gospel to the uncircumcised Gentiles as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. The Spirit helped the first-century persecuted

The newly formed community was called 'Christians' first at Antioch, identifying the distinctive nature of the ecclesial community (Ac.11:26). The ecclesial hallmark of a unified covenantal community that includes both Jews and Gentiles is a landmark in the universal plan of God.

community to break the religio-cultural and national borders of Jerusalem to proclaim the gospel to the Gentile regions of the Greco-Roman world. As a result, a mixed ecclesial community of both Jews and Gentiles was formed in Antioch by breaking down the dividing wall of hostility.

The newly formed community was called 'Christians' first at Antioch, identifying the distinctive nature of the ecclesial

community (Ac.11:26). The ecclesial hallmark of a unified covenantal community that includes both Jews and Gentiles is a landmark in the universal plan of God. The Holy Spirit helped the first-century Jesus community to dismantle the geographical, cultural, and linguistic boundaries in the formation of the universal ecclesia at Antioch.

In the ecclesial expansion, God took the initiative by transforming Apostle Peter from Jerusalem and the Gentile household of Cornelius in Caesarea through visions and dreams that set the stage for the formation of a universal community. By pouring out the Spirit on Gentile believers in Caesarea, God revealed his nature of accepting everyone into the covenantal community.

The Gentile ecclesia at Antioch recognized the call of Barnabas and Saul to create ecclesial communities to the entire inhabited world and sent them off for the mission work. The characteristic mark of this ecclesial community is reflected not only in spreading the gospel to the universal community but also through fellowship and generous giving in the time of a universal famine. The identity mark of the new ecclesia is its commitment to the well-being of all believers in Christ.

The generosity of the Antiochan ecclesial community towards the Jerusalem church in its time of need reflects the caring heart of the worshipping community. The Holy Spirit helped these congregations to be connected to each other by the common faith and witness.

UNIVERSAL BESTOWAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT UPON ALL FLESH



DR. SHAIBU ABRAHAM

Faculty, India Bible College
and Seminary, Kumbanad

From the first book of the Bible to the last, the works of the Spirit of the Lord are clearly mentioned. The Spirit is depicted as God's agent in creation and human affairs. In the early era of Israel's history, the Spirit is portrayed as empowering God's people for specific tasks, enabling leaders to achieve victory over enemies and administer justice. In the Old Testament, we find a progressive bestowal of the Spirit - in the beginning, upon selected individuals, and later, upon the whole of Israel and eventually upon all nations. In contrast, the New Testament portrays the universal bestowal of the Spirit upon "all flesh."

Bestowal of the Spirit upon Selected People

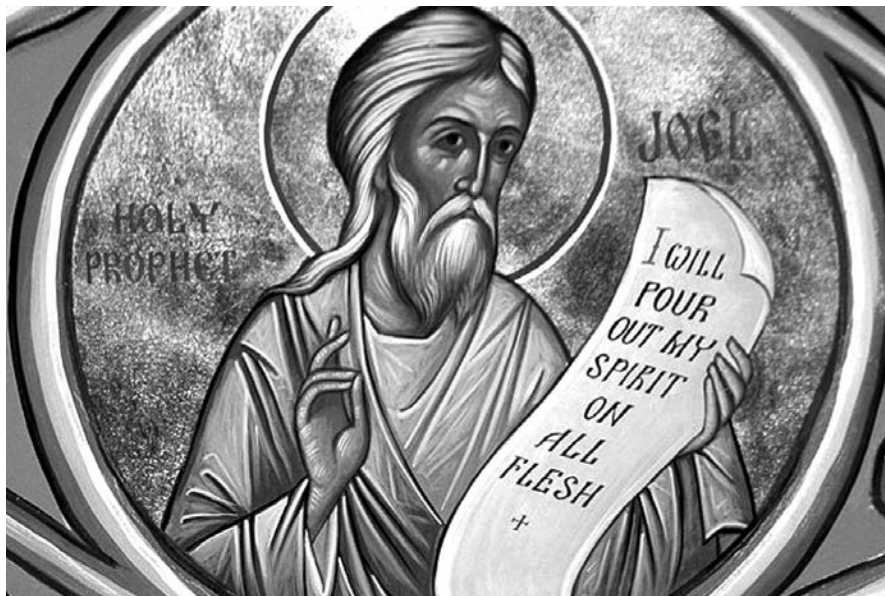
In the Old Testament, the Spirit was often given to chosen individuals to perform specific tasks for the benefit of the whole community. The book of Exodus provides a unique example of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit in providing wisdom and special knowledge upon Bezalel and Oholiab to work of the Tabernacle (Ex. 31: 1-5). It was a supernatural endowment of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge in all kinds of craftsmanship granted by the Holy Spirit for a specific purpose. Similarly, in the book of Judges, the Lord raised up the judges to deliver the people of Israel from the enemies, who included Othniel (Judg. 3:9-10), Ehud (3:15), Deborah (4:4-23), Gideon (6:34; cf. 8:35), Samson (chs.14-16) and others. The central theme in Judges revolves around the coming of the Spirit upon selected few to execute Yahweh's will to deliver his people. After the event of the deliverance, the central character continues to rule and administer justice to the community. For instance, to deliver the people of Israel from King Cushan-Rishathaim of Aram-Naharaim, the Spirit of the Lord came upon Othniel and he defeated the King of Aram and brought rest to the land. The coming of the Spirit upon Othniel marks the point where he takes on a new role of a leader within Yahweh's purposes for Israel and rules the nation for next forty years.



Similarly, in the context of the constant oppression and attacks from the Philistines, Samson was used as an instrument of Yahweh for the deliverance of Israel. The Spirit began to be active in Samson's life (Judg. 13:25) and was stirring Samson to deliver Israel from the Philistines (Judg. 13:5). He had accomplished extraordinary feats that could not be done by any person with mere physical abilities. The Spirit "rushed" upon Samson and gave him the supernatural strength to rip apart an attacking lion with his bare hands (Judg. 14:6). It was the power of the Spirit that empowered him to defeat and kill thirty Philistine men, and then to slay a thousand men, the mighty army of the Philistines, using the jawbone of a donkey (Judg. 13:19; 15:14-15). Samson had more experiences of the Spirit recorded than any other figure in the Old Testament. As we look into the examples of other Judges, we find similar pattern, that the Spirit strengthens Judges to crush their enemies. Moreover, it is also obvious that in the book of the Judges, the Spirit

The Spirit "rushed" upon Samson and gave him the supernatural strength to rip apart an attacking lion with his bare hands (Judg. 14:6). Samson had more experiences of the Spirit recorded than any other figure in the Old Testament.

is principally associated with military action and overcoming the enemy forces of the Israel by empowering selected individuals. Thus, we observe a general pattern in Judges: empowerment by the Spirit is specific to the needs of the nation for deliverance. Furthermore, it also testifies to Yahweh's choice of the particular judge as a figure through whom he would work in the community. We observe a similar pattern in the case of Saul, who became the first king of Israel. The coming of the Spirit upon Saul was announced by the prophet Samuel after his anointing (1 Sam 10:1-13). Samuel described in advance the events that he would encounter immediately after his departure from him; "Then the Spirit of the Lord will possess you, and you will be in a prophetic frenzy...and be turned into a different person"



(1 Sam 10: 6). Immediately after, Saul had been possessed by the Spirit and begun to prophesy (1 Sam 10: 10). Another episode of empowerment by the Spirit took place while the news of the siege of Nahash the Ammonite upon Jabesh-Gilead came to Saul (1 Sam 11: 6). He then sends slaughtered portions of oxen to summon his forces against Nahash (1 Sam. 11: 5–8), and in the succeeding war, Saul delivered Jabesh-Gilead. Similarly, David’s anointing with oil to designate him as the next king was accompanied by the gift of the Spirit: “The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward” (1 Sam. 16:13–14). Later, after he committed adultery and murder, David prayed, “Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me” (Ps. 51:11). It is a poignant petition for the Spirit’s continuing work in his life, which involves both sanctification and empowerment.

In the prophetic era, the Spirit provided power of prophetic utterances to selected ones to proclaim God’s counsel and the Spirit put the words in the prophets’ mouths. It is only when the Spirit of God inspires a person, he/she is able to “speak the word

“**Similarly, the prophet Joel refers to the eschatological gift of the Spirit to the whole community of God’s people and even to all flesh: “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh...” (Joel 2:28-29).**”

of the Lord” as a prophet. The Prophet Micah says, “But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the Lord, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression and to Israel his sin” (Mic. 3:8). The “power” of the Spirit to which Micah referred included “holy courage” to speak hard truth, in contrast

to false prophets, who preached what was pleasing to their hearers and financially profitable to themselves (v. 11).

Bestowal of the Spirit Upon Israel and Nations

Although these were examples of individuals anointed by the Spirit for a task, the Old Testament also refers to outpouring of the Spirit communally. Isaiah foresees a day when the Spirit will be given to “the whole people” and will remain permanently with the people of God: “And as for me, this is my covenant with them, says the Lord: my Spirit which is upon you, and my words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, or out of the mouth of your children, or out of the mouth of your children’s children, says the Lord, from this time forth and for evermore” (Isa. 59:21). Ezekiel recognizes that the giving of the Spirit will guarantee immediate access to the presence of God; the Lord says, “And I will not hide my face from them any longer, for I shall have poured out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Lord God” (Ezek. 39:28-29).

Similarly, the prophet Joel refers to the eschatological gift of the Spirit to the whole community of God’s people and even to all flesh: “I will pour out my spirit on all flesh...” (Joel 2:28-29). Here we find Spirit outpouring as an all-encompassing phenomenon, including even “all flesh,” pointing towards Spirit’s presence universally. However, multiple interpreters of this passage restrict the meaning of ‘all flesh’ to Israel, or specifically Judah. The reason behind such a restricted interpretation is due to the larger context of prophesy addressed to the people of Israel. Therefore, the term “all the flesh” is understood as the ‘weak, powerless, and hopeless’ within the Judean community. Moreover, the possessive pronouns in– “your sons and your daughters...your old men...your young men” also is seen by some as the proof of the Spirit poured upon the Israel. Even though the argument sounds reasonable, a careful analysis of the passage reveals a universal intention of the



bestowal of the Spirit upon all humanity. The verse, "I will pour out my Spirit" need not refer to a particular event but as an ongoing process. Moreover, the phrase, "...during those Days/ then afterwards I will pour out my Spirit" makes it clear that the outpouring is not time bound. The warning of the impending day of Yahweh and physical signs such as the sun turning dark (2:30-31) extends beyond the land of Israel. Similarly, the divine judgement of the nations (the universal judgement) that is mentioned in the next chapter also fits in the universal divine intention of the outpouring of the Spirit. Besides, the response to such signs is universal, "...all who call on the name of Yahweh shall escape" (2:32). Thus, here a universal scope of the outpouring of the Spirit is clearly visible. It is obvious that the Old Testament portrays outpouring of the Spirit in a progressive way, from selected individuals to a community, and then to "all flesh."

Additionally, God's presence and activity in

Taking cue from these Spirit events, the early Pentecostals understood the outpouring of the Spirit in the first century at Pentecost and at the inception of the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement as the fulfilment of divine promises, especially Joel's prophecy concerning the last days.

creation speaks to the universality of the Holy Spirit. It is a fact that all things are created by God's Word and God's Spirit. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath [ruach-Spirit] of his mouth" (Ps. 33:6). Somewhere else in Psalm it is said, "When you hide your face, they [the creatures of the world] are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground" (Ps. 104:29-30). It is this same breath of God bestows life to human beings thus, enabling first man to become "a living being" (Gen. 2:7; cf. Job 33:4). God is universally present and active in the Spirit. God's Spirit is the life-breath of the imago Dei (image of God) in every human being. It

is also through the same Spirit, Yahweh provides soteriological restoration to Israel as well as to other nations (Isa 44:3; Ezek. 36: 27; 39:29; 37:14; Isa 42:1; 59:19; Jer 3:17; Zeph 3:9).

Fulfilment of the Outpouring of the Spirit upon all Flesh

The promise of the bestowal of the Spirit upon "all flesh" prophesied by the prophet Joel had taken at least 400 years to fulfil. The pouring out of God's Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2) indicated that the final chapter of God's history of the world had begun with the birth, life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth. As Peter told the assembled crowds in Jerusalem: "Being . . . exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you


see and hear" (Acts 2:33). It is obvious that at Pentecost, God enacted the first step of the divine plan to pour out His Spirit upon "all flesh." The "devout Jews from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5,8-11) provided the occasion for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the reconstituting of the "new" people of God. Recognizing this historic moment, Peter announces that this event signifies the beginning of the fulfilment of the words spoken through the prophet Joel:

In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, ... Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Acts 2:17-21; Joel 2:28-32).

Peter's explanation of the outpouring of the Spirit was directed towards people of different languages, cultures, and nations both Jews and Gentiles (proselytes who followed the Jewish spirituality, customs and practices). Luke mentions names of at least sixteen groups: "Parthians, Medes, Elamites,

and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs..." (Acts 2:9-11). Peter declared to them that the promise of the Spirit by Yahweh through Joel's prophecy has been here fulfilled. Now, you and "your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." The work of the Holy Spirit in the present age is to include above mentioned groups in the body of Christ.

However, we should not limit the outpouring of the Spirit only upon the Jews and other people groups gathered in Jerusalem in the first century. Peter's quoting of Joel's prophecy (Acts 2:17- 21) specifically points towards a universal redemption - "Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved," - a universal outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh. This emphasis of Peter should



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caution us against reading the “all flesh” in an exclusively ecclesiological sense – Spirit outpouring only within the confines of the church. As we have seen above, the Spirit’s activity is beyond time and space. The phrase, “In the last days,” in Acts 2:17 stretches from the Day of Pentecost to the consummation of the kingdom of God in the return of Jesus Christ. This begs us to envision the outpouring of the Spirit in a universal sense that transcends the institutional boundaries of the church. It is important here to note that this universality is explicitly confirmed by Peter in his sermon to the household of Cornelius: “I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34b-35).

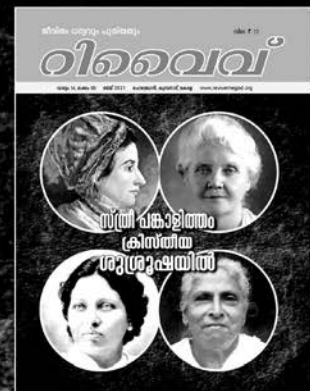
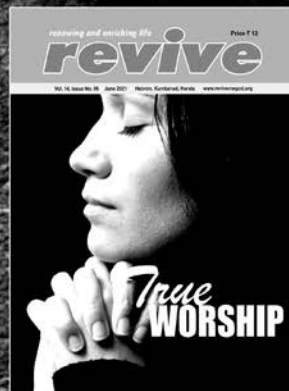
In this universal progression of the bestowal of the Spirit, we witness the inclusion of the Ethiopian eunuch in the community of people of God by the agency of the Spirit (Acts 8:26-40). Similarly, Philip’s

mission to Samaria, and the visit of the apostles Peter and John to there resulted in the reception of the Spirit upon the new Samaritan converts (Acts 8:15b-17). The Spirit manifestation in the household of Cornelius marked a decisive point in the early church to include gentiles against the wish of Peter and Jewish Christians. These events in the first century were the extension of the same Spirit’s bestowal upon “all flesh.” This saga of the Spirit outpouring continued through the history, though in a limited measure. However, the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed powerful outpourings of the Spirit all over the world – Topeka, Kansas; Azusa Street, Los Angeles; Mukti Mission, Pune; Pyongyang, Korea; Beijing, China; Wales, England and so on. Taking cue from these Spirit events, the early Pentecostals understood the outpouring of the Spirit in the first century at Pentecost and at the inception of the twentieth-century Pentecostal movement as the fulfilment of divine promises, especially Joel’s prophecy

concerning the last days.

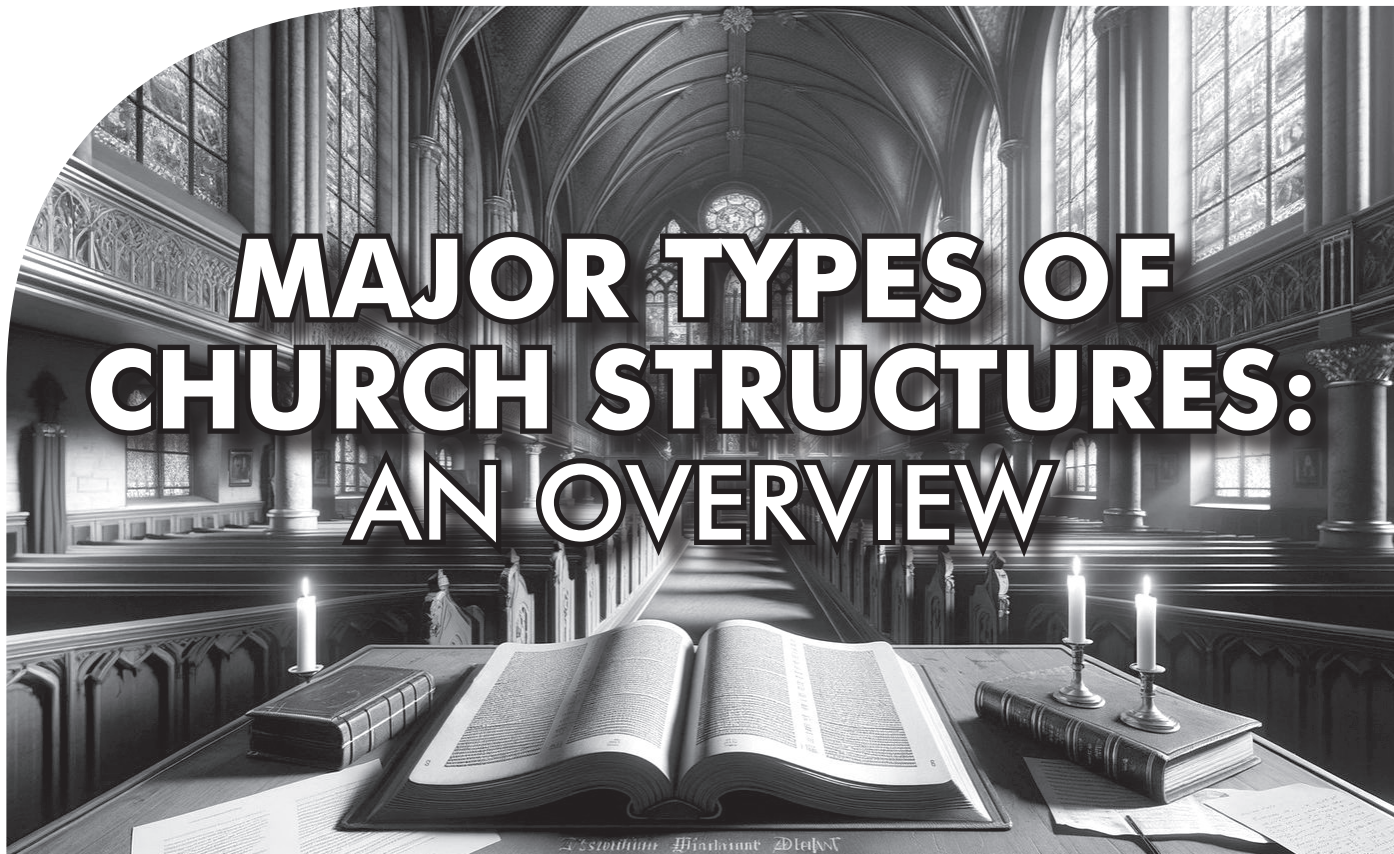
As we conclude our discussion, today the same Spirit is at work globally, leading thousands of people to Christ. The third-world countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia have come under the grip of the bright wind of the Spirit and have been experiencing the never-ceasing, ever-empowering, liberating power, and visible manifestation of the works of the Spirit. It is a mass phenomenon, encompassing a diverse range of people - thousands of ethnolinguistic cultures and languages, reaching an estimated 95% of the world’s population. This Spirit-phenomenon underscores bestowal of the Spirit upon “all flesh.” ●

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The Christian church is a miracle.

It is an international organization, but it goes back two thousand years to a group of twelve disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. It germinated out of a mustard seed (Lk.13:19), but it has become a global human/divine organization which is multi-linguistic, multi-national, multi-racial, and multi-denominational with different organizational structures.

Every segment of the church at every level demands systematic administrative or governing systems. The church is the body of Christ, but it needs human leaders and administrative structures to carry on its daily functions.

CAUSES FOR DIVERSE ECCLESIASTICAL STRUCTURES

From its beginning, the history of the Christianity records the rise and development of diverse ecclesiastical government systems. Theocracy of the early apostolic times accommodated the elements of democracy. Later, episcopacy, the papacy and similar governing structures arose. What are the possible causative factors behind these developments?

We can see several reasons for this development:

- (i) the question of apostolic succession
- (ii) the interpretation or misinterpretation of certain scriptural portions (Mathew.16:18-19, John. 21:15-17)
- (iii) aftermath of persecution and heresies which demanded a systematic church government



- (iv) the quest for leadership and division of the churches
- (v) large scale church growth in different cities and regions and the demand for good leadership and management
- (vi) geographical factors such as the division of East and West
- (vii) political support to certain church leaders particularly to the church in Rome
- (viii) the rise of national states in the West
- (ix) the impact of the Reformation and Protestant movements.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Church administration systems developed over many centuries. Three models deserve special attention: Episcopal, Presbyterian and congregational structures.

“
The Christian church is a miracle. It has an international organization, but it goes back two thousand years to a group of twelve disciples of Jesus of Nazareth. It germinated out a mustard seed (Lk.13:19)
 ”

EPISCOPAL FORMS

Episcopacy was the earliest and most universally practiced ecclesiastical structure after the-apostolic period. The word 'episcopacy' basically denotes the rule of the church by bishops. It is a centralized form of ecclesiastical rule in which the archbishop, bishops, priests and deacons hold positions.

It is very difficult to trace the real starting period of the episcopacy due to the scarcity of accurate sources of information. It is probably accurate to say this church government originated in the second century and developed after Christianity became recognized in the Roman Empire.(the old Catholic imperial church and bishops).

The Episcopal system is known for its claim of apostolic succession, or a historical episco-



pany. Though the global church separated into Western (Roman Catholic Church) and Eastern (Orthodox /Syrian Churches) churches in the 11th century, they maintained this system until the Reformation period without any notable divisions. The post-Reformation period marked the divergence of the Episcopal Church governments into historical and non-historical episcopates.

SCRIPTURAL BASIS OF EPISCOPACY

Proponents of Episcopal government trace its basis from the New Testament and the apostles. They argue that apostolic functions were bestowed upon bishops by ordination. The story of Timothy and Titus is their basis for the emergence of bishops and the episcopacy.

It is not wrong to tie the episco-

“
Proponents of Episcopal government trace its basis from the New Testament and the apostles. They argue that apostolic functions were bestowed upon bishops by ordination.
”

pany with the apostolic period, but the emergence of Paul as the stalwart of the early apostolic church repudiates the so-called apostolic hegemony. He was not counted as one of the twelve. The book of Acts and the Epistles depict Paul both as a missionary par-excellence and also as a brilliant administrator. There is no centralized and rigid protocol with regard to the administration of the Church.

Theological scholars such as Edward Arthur Litton oppose the derivation of the episcopacy from the New Testament and states that the office of the 'bishop' is not a distinct office in the New Testament but synonymous with 'elder'. The New Testament speaks of many bishops but of no archbishop. This shows that the present Episcopal form of government is not evident in the New Testament. Nevertheless, to say that the episcopacy evolved from New Testament forms does not oppose them.

MERITS AND DEMERITS OF EPISCOPACY

The Episcopal structure unites the whole denomination. The head of the church can freely implement dogmatic and pragmatic policies. He can implement any proposals and projects for all parishes. He maintains unique traditions, theology and policies. He maintains discipline in the churches due to his centralized power. Episcopal polity makes possible organic and systematic unity, fellowship and integration of churches and dioceses. Decisions and policies are made for the church and implemented by all local congregations.

A peril of this government system is that it may become governed by secular and temporal values. It may result in autocratic leadership. The Roman Catholic Church fell into this trap and became corrupt. In one sense, the successes or failures of the concerned denomination under this system depend upon the efficiency or inefficiency of the top officials: their vision, event management and problem-solving caliber.

PRESBYTERIANISM

Presbyterianism is the second notable ecclesiastical church government which took its roots from the New Testament. Its government structure lacks an absolute and single power head like an archbishop or pope. It is an ecclesiastical church government by presbyters or elders. Local congregations select the elders (the pastor of the local church will be one among them), and they form a session, which is the governing body of the local church. Sessions form a presbytery which looks after several churches in a region, and presbyteries form the General Assembly which is the national body.

Historically, its origins trace back to apostolic times. The Book of Acts states that apostles appointed elders to take care the church (14:23; 15:22-23; 20:17). Presbyterianism as a systematic church government developed during the post-Reformation period with reformed

theology in Switzerland, Germany, France and Scotland. Protestant mission movements of 18th and 19th centuries in the Afro-Asian nations marked the spreading of this system with certain alterations.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

The Presbyterian church structure has merits and demerits.

- (i) It is more democratic in nature due to the de-centralized system

The Episcopal structure unites the whole denomination. The head of the church can freely implement dogmatic and pragmatic policies. He can implement any proposals and projects for all parishes. He maintains unique traditions, theology and policies.

- (ii) It gives opportunities to more persons (both laymen and clergies) to contribute to the development of the church in egalitarian ways with collective accountability and responsibility.
- (iii) The elders of the local congregations have wider latitude of action from local to national levels.
- (iv) This system gives good avenues

for leadership training.

- (v) It can boost up the unity of the church with more interdependence
- (vi) It prevents individual churches from falling into dogmatic and pragmatic fallacy.
- (vii) Elections prevent perpetuation of weak leaders and continuation of able leaders

Nevertheless, elections of elders, sessions, presbyteries and general assemblies tend toward corruption and polarization. Voluntary association of non-elders is less likely in this system.

CONGREGATIONALISM

Congregationalism means a governance of the church by a whole congregation. The local church is autonomous in nature and function. Every congregation selects their own pastor or elders. They plan and execute programmes and projects, and maintain resources and buildings with no external control. Their main scriptural basis is the 'universal priesthood of all believers' (1 Peter.2:9). Though it is a pure democratic system, they maintain the Lordship of Christ (1.Colossians 1:18) and respect for apostolic leaders (Galatians 1:11-24).

Congregationalism developed as an ecclesiastical administrative structure after the Reformation. There are different versions of this system. Some congregational churches forego any visible form of government by accepting the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Congregational structure provides freedom, equality, fellowship, flexibility and autonomous status to the church.

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF CHURCH GOVERNMENTS

Solomon Rongpi (2005, 1-33) has identified the following basic principles of church government:

- (i) **Problem-solving.** Conflicts and problems are voiced by laymen and leaders and are rectified to avoid division and to maintain unity.
- (ii) **Decision-making.** A good church administrator identifies different dimensions of a problem from diverse angles by collecting maximum information from many sources and discerning possible solutions and alternatives that bear upon the growth of the church.
- (iii) **Planning.** An effective church learns from the failures of the past. Visionary leadership communicates future projects and helps to prepare for them.
- (iv) **Delegation.** Delegation of duties to others allows top leaders to save time, reduce stress and maximize the quality of administration. (see Acts.6.1-7).
- (v) **Staffing.** Enrolling, training, reviewing, evaluation. An effective administration depends upon a good team of subordinates.
- (vi) **Organization.** The coordination of resources and persons to fulfill the purpose of the church.
- (vii) **Church polity.** The general guidance and direction of others to accomplish the tasks or goals.
- (viii) **Motivation.** Inspiration of subordinates by the leadership to move ahead with maximum ability and

devotion.

- (ix) **Control.** The inclusive management of the works within the defined orbit, taking disciplinary and corrective actions, financial planning.
- (x) **Evaluation.** Analysis of successes or failures of programmes, policies and their results.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS


The Book of Acts is our primary handbook to learn the life, mission, ministry and organizational structure of the Christian church and the role of Holy Spirit. The church is both a divine and human movement. The expansion of Christianity within and outside of Roman Empire and around the world resulted in different ecclesiastical organizational structures. Whatever the Church's many forms, Christ is the head of the Church. He selected 12 major disciples, appointed 70 sub-disciples and gave the Great Commission (Matthew 28:16-20) to the church. The growth and protection of the Church ultimately resides in Him.

Christian ministers are not merely 'officers' or

'administrators' but shepherds and co-workers of Christ. Whatever the organizational structure, Christian ministers accomplish the church's mission.


The service and accountability of any private or government officers of this world ends with their retirement. But servants or officers of the Church remain accountable to Christ even after their retirement or death. From Him they receive either reward or punishment! The church is His body and the assembly of His people.

Each church should evaluate its organizational structure to make sure it functions according to the original vision and mission of Jesus and His apostles.



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Translation: Pr. Bijumon



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