

EDITORIAL: WORSHIP

Michael Kimmitt

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come (*Nicene Creed*).

Happy is the man who rolls out of bed on the sabbath, then recollects that this is no day for work—but for worship! There is no bus or train to catch; hopefully, no immediate pressure. A merciful God has given His creatures a day in which to rest, rejoice and worship.

In due time, he meets with his brethren in the local church building. The minister enters with an appropriate reverence. We jointly confess our sins. The Word of God is read, hopefully in our traditional version, from both Old and New Testaments. We rise to exhort one another in “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)! Prayer is offered. We confess our faith and hope in one of the creeds. Then the minister solemnly brings us Christ’s Word, a collection is taken and, after an appropriate benediction, we depart to our homes.

I think it was Richard Baxter who then allows “moderate feasting.” Scripture reminds us of our duty of being “given to hospitality” (I Tim. 3:2).

Six years ago at the BRF Conference there was an earnest discussion on church membership and in particular the problems for those who are where there is simply no appropriate church to join. As a result, Professor Engelsma volunteered to address those interested by e-mail, taking as his starting point Article 28 of the *Belgic Confession* which is entitled, “Every One Is Bound to Join Himself to the True Church.”

The resulting volume, *Bound to Join*, was reviewed in our last issue.

Discussion

We are warned in Scripture about “not forsaking the assembling of ourselves

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together” (Heb. 10:25), and certainly the deliberate action of some brings its own judgment—but this is no help if there is no church! But need this be so? Four times in Scripture we read of “the church in the house” (Rom. 16:5; I Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Philem. 2). Our Lord taught us that when two or three are gathered in His name, He would be in the midst. As we read the book of Acts, we cannot but be impressed with the explosive growth of the church. And history records its progress throughout the world—even in our present day. Under the providence of God, the circumstances of each of us have brought us to our present position in space and time (Ps. 139:16).

Some of us can move—others not. Churches can change—particularly when ministers do! We need to remember that the church is the body of Christ, that He loved it and gave Himself for it, that it is to be provided with bishops (i.e., elders) and deacons, that its worship should be simple “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23), that we are to endeavour “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), etc.

So it may be helpful to note some practical possibilities. When the Church of England legalized the ordination of women there were significant departures from the Anglo-Catholic wing to Rome. What was little-noted was that a few evangelical ministers departed and constituted the Church of England (Continuing). For obvious reasons, the bulk of their congregations did not follow them! But it was right that a principled stand was made and if you like plain prayer-book worship seek them out (www.continuingcofe.org).

Rather quietly the Presbyterian Association has turned into the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of England and Wales with thirteen congregations ranging from Cardiff in the south to Gateshead in the north. “Upholding the Inerrancy of Scripture—Adhering to the Westminster Standards—Fulfilling the Great Commission” (www.epcew.org.uk).

Looking at the *English Churchman*, *Evangelicals Now* and *Evangelicals Today* shows an enormous plethora of evangelical churches. It is scarcely practicable for a journal to offer advice but there is a lot of information available—I suggest readers ask around. There are some fine churches available which may not meet every criteria of Reformed worship—including the one of which your editor is a more than happy member!

Editorial

Immediately before His ascension our Lord sent His disciples to “Go ... teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). On the day of Pentecost, in answer to the question “What shall we do?” Peter said, “Repent, and be baptized ...” (Acts 2:38-39).

I submit that by baptism we joined the church—unless we apostatise we remain members—even if our temporal circumstances prevent us worshipping in a particular local church. We are not *extra ecclesia*! The *Westminster Larger Catechism* Q. 161 to Q. 167 makes considerable application concluding with the question: *How is our baptism to be improved by us?*

We do well also to remind ourselves that there is a Christian ethic to be maintained against abortion, adultery, divorce, fornication, sodomy, etc. And it looks as if our real enemy may shortly be the state! Meanwhile in our daily Bible study we must ourselves pursue the demand that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (II Tim. 3:16-17).

COMMENT

Thanks for your interesting and provocative article, Michael.

I would like here to make a couple of points. First, it is true that Christ is in the midst of two or three believers who meet in His name (Matt. 18:20). But this does not mean that every gathering of believers, whether two or three or twenty or two hundred, is a church. When my wife and I have a meal and pray, etc., Christ is with us, but Mary and I do not constitute a church. Several believers having a picnic together or communing at a BRF conference—yes, Christ is there but these groups are not churches. They are beneficial and blessed times; they are occasions when we as Christians fellowship together but they are not a church.

A church (institute) requires a plurality of elders (Acts 14:23) and at least one deacon (Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3). There the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper can be administered because there are elders to “oversee” (the idea of the Greek word *episcopos*, a bishop or elder). The biblical references to a

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church in one's house teach us that there was a church (with elders, church discipline, confessing members to elect office-bearers, sacraments, etc.) which met in a house, presumably a house large enough to accommodate the people, inside or outside. For example, the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in N. Ireland has held church meetings in a house in its past and many other churches all around the world have done, or are doing, this.

Second, the argument from *Westminster Larger Catechism* Q. & A. 161-167 is intriguing but it can hardly be used to overturn *Westminster Confession* 25 (especially sections 2-4), which specifically addresses the subject of the church, nor *Belgic Confession* 27-35 nor the historic Christian and Reformed tradition.

For more on all this, see my review and defence of Prof. David Engelsma's book *Bound to Join* (www.cprf.co.uk/articles/boundtojoinreview.htm).¹

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¹ *Bound to Join* (£8.80 inc. P&P) can be ordered from Mary Stewart (7 Lislunna Road, Kells, N. Ireland, BT42 3NR or 028 25 891851). For more information, go online (www.cprf.co.uk/bookstore/boundtojoin.htm).