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(4) We have repeatedly pointed out, in discussing the passages mentioned under point (2) above, the priority of the Spirit or his gifts in the mutual relations of function, gift and office. It is the charisma, not the office, that creates the ministry: the office is but the channel through which the office-bearer may exercise the given charisma for a particular function;<sup>122</sup> and the church's appointment to office (where such is involved) is but a sign of recognizing a person's spiritual gifts and a response to God's will made known in the bestowing of those gifts.<sup>123</sup> In this sense, it is correctly said that 'all order is an "afterwards", an attempt to follow what God has already designed'.<sup>124</sup> At the same time, we may not go so far as to say that church order in the New Testament is 'functional, regulative, serving, *but not constitutive*; and that is what is decisive';<sup>125</sup> for, in as much as the Church does confirm by its order those whom the Spirit has marked out in freedom (as, e.g., in the case of the Seven in [Acts 6:1–6](#), or of the presbyter-bishop in [Acts 14:23](#); [20:28](#) and in the Pastoral Epistles,) it gives evidence that church order even in the New Testament is not entirely devoid of a constitutive character.<sup>126</sup>

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# Evangelicals and the Doctrine of the Church in European Church History

Klaas Runia

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*In this paper the author discusses some of the tensions concerning the nature of the church that developed within Evangelicalism in Europe during the past 450 years. He gives special attention to Luther's concept of 'Church within the Church'; to the tension between the*

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<sup>122</sup> 'We have perhaps to learn from the NT that function is more important than office' (G. W. Bromiley, *ISBER* 1 [1979] 517a). The author speaks of 'the two *functions* of episcopate and diaconate' even in the Pastorals (ibid. 517b, emphasis added).

<sup>123</sup> G. Lambert, *ZPEB* 1.861b: 'In the NT church emphasis was placed upon the possession of spiritual gifts as a necessary condition for ministerial leadership'.

<sup>124</sup> Schweizer, *Church Order* 102 (=7m); cf. 187 (=22g), 200 (=24h) n. 753. Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic* 12 n. 40, thinks that the words just quoted 'can be misleading'; but in context there should be no danger of their meaning being misunderstood.

<sup>125</sup> Schweizer, *Church Order* 205 (=24l) (emphasis supplied).

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Barnett, *The Diaconate* (see n. 14 above) 15–16. The author objects that Schweizer's position (as cited in our text, see previous note) 'would seem to lead to a kind of subjectivism that is not in accord with the record of Scripture and that serves to weaken the unity of the Church' (15), and that while 'a major concern of Schweizer ... is to maintain the freedom of the Holy Spirit to work in the Church', yet 'it is surely limiting the freedom of the Spirit to argue that he does not act here in a constitutive way'. (16).

*Reformers and Anabaptists, to European pietistic and renewal movements and the unity of Church as only spiritual. Some discussion in the area of Pentecostalism and of para-church agencies would have been welcomed.*  
(Editor)

## INTRODUCTION

There are several reasons why it is very necessary for us as Evangelicals to give serious attention to this topic.

1. The main churches of Europe generally find themselves in a *situation of crisis*. Nothing has really changed since Alfred Kuen wrote in his book *I Will Build My Church* (E.T. in 1971): 'Everything that bears the name church is at present passing through one of the most serious crises in history, at least in Europe'.<sup>1</sup>

2. The *solutions* offered so far are not really hopeful and helpful. I mention a few. There is the *ecumenical* solution offered by the Ecumenical Movement as embodied in the WCC. Here all emphasis is put upon the organic unity of the church. But is this really the solution? Will the lame and the blind when they go together, really be able to help one another in reaching the goal?<sup>2</sup> Others including many in the ecumenical movement believe that the churches should concentrate on their social task. In this way they might become relevant again. But does the world really need a church that basically has no other message than the progressive political and social parties of our own day? Others again feel that the churches' problem can be solved by a more sociological approach to the institutional side of the church. Being a human organization, the church should listen to the advice of the sociologist, whose *p. 41* job it is to study human organizations, and who can offer remedies for organizations that have lost their touch with reality. Usually the solution offered is a pluralist church that should try to cater for the needs and problems of today's people.

3. Now I am sure that these solutions do not have a strong appeal for most Evangelicals. But do we have a better solution? Here I come to the third reason why it is necessary for us to give serious attention to the question of ecclesiology. I am afraid that it is *one of the most neglected parts of our doctrine*. In my preparation for this paper I glanced through and at times also carefully studied many books on Evangelicalism. What struck me time and again was the fact that little or nothing was said about the evangelical doctrine of the church. When e.g., Donald G. Bloesch enumerates the doctrinal hall marks of Evangelicalism,<sup>3</sup> he mentions many important matters, but there is no separate item on the doctrine of the church. The church is mentioned only under the heading: 'the spiritual mission of the church'. The same is true of Millard Erickson's *The New Evangelical Theology*<sup>4</sup> and Fritz Laubach's *Aufbruch der Evangelikalen*.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred F. Kuen, *I Will Build My Church*, 1971, 283. He mentions the following 'manifestations' of this crisis: dechristianization of Europe, depopulation of the churches, the church having become a ceremonial institution, internal secularization of the church, multitudinism, social Christianity, the weakening of the message, clericalism and institutionalism, and the scattering of the Christians. He also mentions some causes, such as liberal theology, intellectualism of faith, the Constantinian system (299–304).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Alan Cole, *The Body of Christ*, 1964, 86.

<sup>3</sup> Donald G. Bloesch, *The Evangelical Renaissance*, 1974, 48–79.

<sup>4</sup> Published in 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Published in 1972.

For all these reasons it is high time for us as Evangelicals to give serious thought to the doctrine of the church. At the same time we must realize from the outset that it is a very difficult topic. For can one really speak of *the* evangelical doctrine of the church? Are Evangelicals not hopelessly divided, not only as to their doctrine of the church, but also as to their actual place within the church? Some belong to established or national churches. Others belong to Free churches. Others again belong to assemblies of brethren or charismatic groups. How can we ever find a common doctrine of the church in such a situation?

I have been asked to approach the matter primarily from a European historical perspective. When I studied my subject, I found it to be increasingly fascinating, but I also discovered that the pattern is so intricate that after a while one has the feeling of wandering in a labyrinth without an exit!

## **I. EVANGELICALS AND THE CHURCH IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Evangelicalism has a very *intricate and complicated pedigree*. Historically it has its origin in the Reformation of the 16th century. But there is not a direct and straight line from the Reformation to today's Evangelicals. In the intervening centuries all kinds of developments took place **P. 42** and in each case one can discern a specific ecclesiology. At times there were even several ecclesiologies side by side. In this main part of my paper I shall briefly outline the various developments, each time concentrating on the concomitant doctrine(s) of the church.

### **The Reformers**

#### *a) Luther and Calvin*

I shall start with the *16th century Reformation* itself. It is a well-known fact that the doctrine of the church had a central place in the theology of the Reformers. One can even defend the thesis that for the first time in history a fundamental and full-orbed ecclesiology was developed. Medieval theology had no doctrine of the church. No council had ever formulated such a doctrine. The church was simply there! Yet there was an underlying conception which was generally accepted. The church was the church of the sacrament and of the priest, it could dispose of God's grace and therefore was an institution of immense power. Consequently all emphasis was placed upon the visible institution. God's church, the Body of Christ, was simply identical with the visible organization of the R.C. Church.

Following Luther's rediscovery of the Gospel of justification by pure grace and by faith alone, the Reformers arrived at an altogether different conception of the church. For them the church was fundamentally an object of faith. It is the people of God, called into being by the preaching of the Word of God. The first of the *Theses of Berne* of 1528, one of the oldest official documents of the Reformation, puts it thus: 'The holy Christian Church, whose only Head is Christ, is born of the Word of God, abides in the same, and does not listen to the voice of a stranger'.<sup>7</sup> The first Lutheran confession, the Confession of Augsburg of 1530, says basically the same in part. VII: 'It is ... taught among us that one holy Christian church will be and remain for ever. This is the assembly of all

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur Cochrane (ed.), *Reformed Confessions of the Sixteenth Century*, 1956, 49.

believers among whom the Gospel is preached in its purity and the holy sacraments are administered according to the Gospel'.<sup>8</sup>

The same idea we also find in all the Reformed confessions of the 16th century. The church is essentially spiritual in nature. It is a spiritual reality which can be seen and recognized only by the eyes of faith. Yet this emphasis on the spiritual nature of the church did not mean a flight into spiritualism, as if the true church were a kind of Platonic reality, p. 43 floating somewhere above the historical reality of the institutional church. On the contrary, the church which is invisible as to its spiritual nature, at the same time is visible in the earthly community of believers, in whose midst the Gospel is being preached and the sacraments are being administered. Calvin in particular always placed much emphasis upon the visible aspect of the church. In his *Institutes*: 'Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists (cf. [Eph. 2:20](#)). For his promise cannot fail: 'Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them' ([Matt. 18:20](#)).<sup>9</sup> He liked to call this church 'the common mother of all the godly, which bears, nourishes, and brings up children to God, kings and peasants alike; and this is done by the ministry'.<sup>10</sup> Similar ideas we find in Luther's writings.

At this very point, however, of the unity of the visible and invisible aspects of the church the Reformers were facing a very difficult problem. The medieval church, which they tried to reform, had always been a *Volkskirche*, a national or multitudinist church. Every citizen of the land was automatically a member of the church. In the Reformation this pattern continued. Entire cities and villages joined the Reformation movement. Entire parishes turned wholesale from Roman-Catholic into Lutheran or Reformed. But could one really call such parishes 'true' churches of Jesus Christ? Luther became very vexed by this problem. Around 1522/23 he began to wonder whether it was correct to offer the Lord's Supper indiscriminately to the crowds who asked for it, not out of spiritual hunger, but for the simple reason that it had always been like that. In a sermon on Good Friday, 1523, he suggested: 'One could gather separately those who believe correctly ... I have been wanting for a long time to do it, but it has not been possible; for there has not yet been sufficient preaching and writing'.<sup>11</sup> A few years later, in his book *The German Mass*,<sup>12</sup> Luther actually advocated the idea of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia* (the little church within the church), i.e., a nucleus of true believers existing within the territorial church as a leaven. To be true, this was not his ideal. The ideal was the reformation of the entire church. But since the latter was unattainable, the idea of gathering the true believers into an inner church, seemed 'second best'.<sup>13</sup> However, as far as we know, Luther never practised it. Already in *The German Mass* he p. 44 wrote: 'As yet I neither can nor desire to begin, or to make rules for such a congregation or assembly. I have not yet the persons necessary to accomplish it; nor do I observe many

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<sup>8</sup> Theodore G. Tappert (ed.), *The Book of Concord*, 1959, 32.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV, i, 9.

<sup>10</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Eph. 4:13*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kuen, *op. cit.*, 204.

<sup>12</sup> Bard Thompson (ed.), *Liturgies of the Western Church*, 1961, 124f.

<sup>13</sup> Thompson, *op. cit.*, 126.

who strongly urge it'.<sup>14</sup> I think there were several reasons why Luther never came around to putting the 'ecclesiolae' into practice. (1) He leaned too much on the civil authorities for the execution of the reformation of the church. In fact, he allowed them to organize the church and to govern it by law.<sup>15</sup> (2) He retained the idea of the Constantinian *Corpus Christianum*, that is, of a Christian nation, which in its totality is regarded as Christian and in which 'throne and altar' are so closely related that the State also has a say in the affairs of the church. (c) He was frightened by the impact of the spiritualist movement, in particular of the Anabaptists.

#### *b) The Radical Reformers—Anabaptists*

This leads me to the views of the *Radical Reformers*. They had a much more radical conception of the reformation of the church. In their opinion the church had 'fallen' in the era of Constantine, when the illicit union of church and state came about, a union which ever after was per-petuated by the rite of infant baptism which caused numberless nominal Christians to be added continually to the church. The radical Reformers believed that it was impossible to revive and/or to reform the existing church. The only solution was to restore it to its prime virginity. Not reformation but restitution, was their slogan. This meant:<sup>16</sup> (1) rejection of infant baptism—one can enter the church only through baptism following a personal confession of faith; (2) strict discipline among those who have entered the church; (3) evangelistic witness to those outside the church; and (4) abolition of all hierarchical distinctions between believers.

The main Reformers were strongly opposed to this view of the church. As a matter of fact, the Anabaptists and others belonging to the Radical Reformation were persecuted by the new Protestants no less than by the Roman-Catholics. Yet the ideas of the radical Reformers continued to have their impact on many people in the following centuries. In a way, one could say that the various strands of thought present in the 16th century have influenced all the following movements. All the main ideas were already present in that formative century and they all return in subsequent developments: the idea of the essentially spiritual nature of the p. 45 church, the idea of the national church, of the 'ecclesiola in ecclesia', of the free church, of the gathered church, etc. They do not always return in simple purity. Sometimes the lines cross each other, at other times they repel each other. But whatever may be the case, they are all basic ideas of the 16th century, recurring in ever new patterns.

### **Movements after the Reformation**

#### *a) The Puritans of England*

In the period after the Reformation we see various developments. The first one we must mention is the *Puritan Movement* in England, in the 16th and 17th centuries. One can distinguish three concentric circles: (1) It sought the inward reformation of people through conversion and sanctification. (2) It sought the outward reformation of the church by a closer adherence to the biblical structures of the church. (3) It sought the renewal of society as a whole by promoting more respect for the things of God and the laws of England.

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<sup>14</sup> M. Lloyd-Jones, 'Ecclesiola in Ecclesia', in *Approaches to Reformation of the Church*, 1965, 61.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. E. Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, 1953, 97.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. D. P. Kingdom, 'The Anabaptists', in *Approaches to Reformation of the Church*, 1965, 21.



Most Puritans had a high view of the church, basically similar to that of the main Reformers. For this reason they were very wary of all separatism. They did not want to break away from the Church of England, but sought to reform it from within or, as J. I. Packer put it, they wanted to eliminate 'Popery from its worship, prelacy from its government, and pagan irreligion from its membership'.<sup>17</sup> The primary object of its leaders was to influence the whole of the Church of England and to carry on the reform, which they felt had stopped instead of going on and completing itself. Unfortunately, the political developments did not allow them to reach their goal of reforming the church from within, and consequently in the second half of the 17th century they were forced to establish their own Presbyterian and Congregationalist Churches.

#### *b) The Reformed Pietists of Holland*

A second development, which is of interest for our subject took place in the Netherlands. It was the so-called *Second Reformation Movement*, later on issuing in *Reformed Pietism*. This movement was deeply influenced by the theology of the Reformers, on the one hand, and by English Puritanism, on the other. With the latter it shared the concern to complete the reformation of doctrine by a reformation of life. Hence its emphasis on personal piety and holiness of life. This naturally implied a critical attitude towards the situation in the national church. To be true, *p. 46* they were not separatists. Usually they did not break away from the established church, but preferred to meet in so-called 'conventicles', small gatherings of converted people, usually held on Sunday evening, for the purpose of discussing the sermons of the day or a portion of Scripture. Yet it cannot be denied that this practice did introduce an anti-institutional element into their view of the church, expressing itself in depreciation of the established church with its preaching and sacraments. In this way separatist tendencies were encouraged, at times leading to actual separation.

#### *c) The German Pietists*

The third development is that of *German Pietism*. This was a movement for spiritual renewal, arising in the Lutheran Churches of continental Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. In many ways it was a reaction against Lutheran Orthodoxy with its emphasis on pure doctrine and the objective aspects of the Christian faith as found in the Word, the sacraments and the confessions, tending to neglect the 'inward' accompaniments of faith (such as regeneration, the indwelling of the Spirit, etc). Over against this Orthodoxy the Pietists stressed the necessity of the Spirit's work in the believer. Likewise it is not surprising that in Pietism the idea of holding private gatherings of the converted came up again. Philip Spener, the father of German Pietism, started them in his own house in 1670. The object was to bring converted people together for Bible reading, prayer, discussion of the sermons, etc., in order to deepen their spiritual life. Soon these circles were called '*collegia pietatis*' (hence the name 'Pietism'). In his *Pia Desideria*, published in 1675, Spener developed the idea in greater detail. Over against the evils of the time, as found in both church and society, he proposed the establishment of *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* not only for Bible reading but also for mutual watch and helpfulness. In support of these ideas he made a direct appeal to Luther, in particular to his doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. It should be noted that Spener and his followers did not reject, or separate themselves from, the institutional church. In fact, Spener was very much against all separatism. Yet it is evident that their emphasis on the small groups of true believers

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<sup>17</sup> J. I. Packer, 'Puritanism as a Movement of Revival', in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. LII, 1980, 3.

could easily lead to indifference to the church as an institution. The real Christian fellowship was experienced in the small circles.

One more thing must be mentioned at this point. There was a real ecumenical thrust in Pietism. The Pietists were quick to seek spiritual unity with other Christians. Denominational ties were far less important than the spiritual unity we have in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. [p. 47](#) This attitude has deeply influenced subsequent evangelical movements, such as the missionary movements and the student movement.

#### *d) The Methodists*

For the fourth development we move again to 18th century England, where *Methodism* came into existence. In many ways it was analogous to what had happened and was happening on the continent. Again we observe the emphasis on the small circles of converted people and on the priesthood of all believers, to which now is added the idea of lay-officers. As we all know, John Wesley did not deliberately seek a separation from the Church of England (as a matter of fact, he himself died a member of the Church of England), yet from the beginning it was virtually inevitable that Methodism should become a separate body. In particular when Wesley started an annual conference, he went beyond Luther's idea of the *ecclesiolae in ecclesia* and set himself and the whole movement on the road that led to separation.

Many Evangelicals in the Church of England did not go along with Wesley, but preferred to do their work within the established church. Even though critical of many aspects of church life, they nevertheless believed that, as long as they were free to preach and/or believe the Gospel, they should try to reform the church from within.

#### *e) Revival movements*

The fifth development we have to mention is that of the *revival movements* of the 18th and 19th centuries. Although they originated in the churches of North America, they have deeply influenced various sections of European Christians, both on the continent and in the United Kingdom. Their emphasis on conversion and personal holiness, to a large extent derived from Puritan writings and Methodist preaching, changed the face of many congregations. One of their richest fruits was the rise of the modern missionary movement. Yet we must also add that revivalist thinking has strongly contributed to a further neglect of the doctrine of the church. Due to its emphasis on personal faith, it strongly promoted the idea that the spiritual unity of true believers is the main and real thing and that, compared with this, the institutional church is of secondary importance.

### **Movements in the 19th Century**

All these various movements of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries have continued to exert their influences on the *19th century* and oftentimes have given impulses for new developments. Quite often there was a [p. 48](#) cross-fertilization between the various movements. Time permits me to mention only a few important aspects.

#### *a) In the United Kingdom*

For the United Kingdom I must mention two developments in particular.

(i) In 1846 the *Evangelical Alliance* was established. In a time of increasing secularization, on the one hand, and a growing strength of ecumenism, on the other, leading people from various Protestant churches and groups came together with the object of enabling Christians 'to realize in themselves and to exhibit to others that a living and everlasting union binds all true believers together in the fellowship of the



Church of Christ'.<sup>18</sup> These last words are taken from the tail-end of the first resolution, unanimously adopted by the Inaugural Conference. What did the brethren mean by the word 'Church'? What did they mean by the term 'unity'? Let us listen to the first part of the same resolution. It starts as follows: 'That the church of the living God, while it admits of growth, is one church, never having lost, and being incapable of losing its essential unity. Not, therefore, to create this unity, but to confess it, is the design of their assembling together'. Dr. J. B. A. Kessler has pointed out that these words have played a vital role in the whole development of the Evangelical Alliance.<sup>19</sup> According to these words essential unity can never be lost. So, whatever is lost by all our divisions, is virtually non-essential. Or to put it in another way, visible, organizational unity is not directly related to the essence. 'From here it is only a small step to say that our divisions are not so important after all'.

(ii) The second development to be mentioned for the United Kingdom in the 19th century is the rise of the *holiness movement* in the second half of the century. Here the great object was the deepening of spiritual life and the promotion of practical sanctification. The movement found its main platform in the Keswick Conferences, which were inter-confessional and inter-denominational in structure. It cannot be denied that these conferences have been a great blessing for many Christians, but it must also be admitted that by their one-sided emphasis on the spiritual nature of Christian unity they have fostered the idea that the institutional church is virtually of secondary importance. Many people, belonging to 'mixed' local congregations, experienced their real spiritual fellowship at the conferences, rather than in the local congregation itself. [p. 49](#)

#### *b) On the Continent*

For the *Continent* we first of all mention the so-called *Reveil Movement*, which became very influential in certain parts of Switzerland, France, Germany and Holland. Having its origin in the awakening of the early 19th century, it strongly emphasized the need for a personal relationship with Christ. In some sections of the movement people were very confessional, this fact at times leading to their separation from the national church. Others stayed within the national church and tried to reform it from within. Others again were forced out of the national church and thus compelled to establish their own free churches. On the whole, they were convinced of the importance of the institutional church. But since the leadership of the church, both locally and nationally, usually was in the hands of liberal churchmen, the people of the *Reveil Movement* often sought an interim solution in bringing the faithful together in small groups for Bible study, prayer, etc. In other words, the ideal of the 'ecclesiolae in ecclesia' again played an important role.

As for 19th century *Germany* we must mention the fact that there were several movements of awakening. Some of them were more pietistic, others more confessional, others again a combination of both. One of the most important movements, that arose in the third quarter of the century was the *Gemeinschaftsbewegung* (the Community Movement). According to the recent *Gemeindelexikon*<sup>20</sup> it had several roots: the Reformation of the 16th century; Pietism in the form of Neo-Pietism; the Revival Movement; and the Holiness Movement. Various organizations and conferences

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. B. A. Kessler Jr., *A Study of the Evangelical Alliance in Great Britain*, 1968, 36.

<sup>19</sup> Kessler, *op. cit.*, 36/7.

<sup>20</sup> Erich Gedlbach a.o. (eds), *Evangelisches Gemeindelexikon*. 1978, 201.

belonged (and still belong) to it. As regards the relationship With the institutional churches, we observe two different attitudes. Some tried to work within the institutional church, others exhibited more separatist tendencies and had their own fellowship meetings. Yet even they generally did not break with the institutional church.<sup>21</sup> Nowadays there is a general tendency to be active within the church.

In the 19th century we find similar patterns in the *Scandinavian countries*. Many evangelical Christians worked within the established church. Others were led to the establishment of Free Churches either on the ground of their own ecclesiology or by compulsion from the side of the State and the State Church.<sup>22</sup>

Looking back for a moment we may conclude that there were some traits common to nearly all these 19th century movements: [p. 50](#)

- (1) They placed much emphasis on personal piety and holiness.
- (2) They all believed that there is a spiritual unity of all true believers.
- (3) They often exhibited an ecumenical spirit. Believers, belonging to different confessions and denominations, worked together in the area of missions, social and philanthropic work, education etc.
- (4) In many cases there was little interest in the reformation of the institutional church. The real fellowship was often experienced in small groups which met for personal devotions. Consequently, the doctrine of the church remained under-developed.

### **Movements in the 20th Century**

All these lines continued in *our 20th century*. Especially in the second half of this century, Evangelicalism appears to be a growing force everywhere. Yet the doctrine of the church remains a very problematic area. As to their ecclesiastical allegiance, Evangelicals are sorely divided. Many of them belong to the national church in their country. Many others belong to various Free Churches, but by now the older and larger of these have also obtained a *Volkskirche* character. There are some Evangelical Free Churches, but usually they are rather small. I am inclined to think that by far the greatest number of Evangelicals still experience their real spiritual fellowship in inter-denominational organizations rather than in their local parish or congregation.

As I said, the doctrine of the church is still a problem. This became quite manifest in the *Covenant of Lausanne*, 1974. After an introductory article on the Purpose of God, there are two articles on Scripture and Christ. Next, the articles 4 and 5 immediately speak of the evangelistic and social responsibilities of evangelical Christians. The church is mentioned only at the end of article 5, where 'incorporation into his church' is mentioned as one of the results of evangelism. It is only in article 6 that the church is explicitly mentioned, but this very same article closes with the statement: 'The church is the community of God's people rather than an institution'. Although I fully agree with the first part of this statement (the church in its deepest essence is the community of God's people), I must object to the implicit suggestion of a contrast between the church as the community of believers and the church as an institution. It is always both at the same time, and exactly here we find our real problem; Article 7 of the Covenant contains a call to co-operation and unity, but it is all expressed in individual rather than ecclesiastical terms, even though the article starts with the beautiful statement: 'We

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Philip E. Hughes (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Christianity*, Vol. IV (1972), 118.

affirm that the church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose'. I believe that the ecclesiological ambiguity of p. 51 Lausanne is characteristic for the evangelical movement as a whole in our day.

## II. THE EVANGELICAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

I would like to start with some general comments on Evangelicalism made by W. Stanford Reid. Some twenty years ago he wrote a rather sharply worded article in *Christianity Today* on 'Evangelical Defeat by Default'.<sup>23</sup> In it he mentioned four significant shortcomings of evangelicals in general. (1) They have failed to come to grips with the contemporary situation. (2) They have not shown sufficient churchmanship. (3) They have often failed to support fellow-evangelicals when they tried to rectify the situation by action. (4) They have failed in the realm of thought. A little further in the same article he also mentions some of the causes, such as 'sheer worldliness' (he means: we are scared of what liberals may say about us) laziness, both spiritual and intellectual; a false spirituality, manifesting itself in a refusal to take action; and, finally, the *erroneous doctrine of the church* which is so often found among Evangelicals. He describes this erroneous doctrine as follows: Many Evangelicals 'tend to regard the visible, organized church as relatively unimportant, primarily because in it one finds many who have little faith, if any at all'.

Is this charge of Stanford Reid borne out by the facts discovered in our historical survey? Let us see what we have found so far, I mention the following points.

1. There often was (and is) a *one-sided emphasis on the spiritual nature of the church*. I do not deny, of course, that the deepest secret of the church is that it is the people of God, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit: On purpose I mention Father, Son and Holy Spirit, The real-nature of the church Can be seen only within a trinitarian framework, and this real nature can be recognized only by faith. Luther was well aware of this, as appears from his famous dictum: *sub cruce tecta est ecclesia, latent sancti*—hidden under the cross is the church, hidden are the saints. But where do we find this spiritual reality? Nowhere else than in all those congregations, parishes, assemblies (or whatever other name may be used), in which people come together to worship God, to hear the word preached and to partake of the sacraments. It is unfortunate indeed that in our evangelical tradition we have often overstressed the distinction between the visible and the invisible aspects of the church. We have even used this p. 52 distinction as a means of escaping from the troubles in our own local church or denomination. Although we are still members of the visible church, have our children baptized in it and celebrate the Lord's Supper with the local congregation, yet we find our real fellowship outside it. We experience our real fellowship in the many undenominational organizations which have come into existence in the last century and a half. When we go to our undenominational conferences and conventions, we even have communion services!

2. My second point is closely related to the foregoing: there was (and still is) a *one-sided emphasis on the spiritual unity of the believers*. At Lausanne Henri Blocher put it thus: Most evangelical Christians 'believe unity is given, and they stress it; it is *invisible* and "spiritual". No one can destroy the link which joins all the true believers, the answer to Jesus' request which the Father could do nothing but fulfil, because He always grants his Son's request. The existence of varied denominations has nothing to do with this

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<sup>23</sup> *Christianity Today*, Vol. VI, no. 7.

certain unity, definitely obtained “in the Spirit”<sup>24</sup> Again I must immediately add that the unity of God’s children is essentially of a spiritual nature. But again we may not fall into the dichotomy of invisible versus visible. I am afraid that we often do fall into this trap and that this is largely due to the fact that we have a too individualistic concept of faith. We put all emphasis on the personal relationship with Jesus Christ, in and through the Holy Spirit. Wherever one recognizes this in another person, there is unity. This is true, of course, but it is not the whole truth! When Jesus in the high priestly prayer in [John 17](#) prayed for the unity of his followers, this was not just a matter of spiritual unity only, but he also spoke of its visibility. As a matter of fact he mentioned it twice and in both instances it had a bearing on the missionary task of his followers. Twice our Lord prayed ‘that they may be one ... so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me’ ([17:21](#), [23](#)). Are we, with our emphasis on spiritual unity across denominational barriers, really obedient to this prayer of our Lord?

3. My third point is a question: To what extent are we moving along *Anabaptist* lines rather than along the path shown by the *main Reformers*? I do not ask this in judgemental spirit. I do not want to glorify the main Reformers, nor do I want to condemn the radical Reformers. It may well be that we have to learn from both parties. At any rate, I am inclined to think that both parties have left us with an unsolved problem. I mean the problem indicated by the terms [p. 53](#) ‘national’ or ‘gathered’ church, or if you wish, ‘multitudinist’ and ‘voluntarist’ church. In the former case people belong to the church by birth and therefore are baptized as infants. As long as they do not intentionally withdraw, they are regarded and treated as rightful members of the church. In the case of the gathered or voluntarist church, only converted or born-again people can be members of the church. Usually admission takes place by means of adult or believers’ baptism.

These two views are often identified with the main position of the time of the Reformation. The great Reformers would have opted for the national church idea, the Anabaptist for the gathered church idea. In a very general sense this is not incorrect, yet it is not fully correct either. As far as the main Reformers are concerned, the situation was more complicated than that indicated above. Calvin, for instance, did not simply accept every citizen of Geneva as a rightful member of the church, but tried to purify the church by a strict discipline. Luther, as we have seen, was not happy about the existing situation either, as appears from his suggestion to establish *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*. On the other hand, there is no reason to idealize the Anabaptist position either. It may solve certain problems for a certain period of time, but usually after one or two generations the old problems recur. Moreover, may we exclude the children of believers from the membership of the church?

I often have the feeling that as Evangelicals we are not at all clear about the matter. At any rate, there is not a great deal of unanimity at this point. Some Evangelicals emphasize the continuity of the church and believe that they should try to reform the church, to which they belong from within. Others also stay within their historic denomination, but ‘only just’, almost ‘contre coeur’. Their real allegiance is somewhere else. In actual fact they, with Luther and the Pietists, opt for the idea of the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, although in their case it is an undenominational rather than a denominational ‘ecclesiola’. Others again opt for the gathered church idea. In 1944 the (German) Union of Evangelical-Free Church Congregations even put into its confession: ‘The congregation of the Lord belongs to God’s new creation and is not yet there, where God’s Word is preached and heard, but only there, where people come to the new life and join

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<sup>24</sup> Henri Blocher, ‘The Nature of Biblical Unity’, *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*, 1975, 381.

the fellowship of God's children'.<sup>25</sup> There is much confusion indeed. What G. E. Duffield says about the Evangelicals in the Church of England about the middle of last century seems to apply still to many Evangelicals of our day. He writes, 'Many Evangelicals began to abandon their p. 54 Reformed heritage and become Anabaptist. They neglected their doctrine of the church, they treated the sacraments rather lightly, they formed little interdenominational groups which sought to win individuals for Christ but neglected the wider needs of society, the nation and the state'. When about 1930 the Anglo-Catholics tried to recapture the Church of England, Evangelicals could do hardly anything at all. 'Just because they were interdenominational, they could not tackle the doctrines of the church, of society, of church and state, of baptism, etc, for on all these they were divided'.<sup>26</sup> I am glad to notice that today Evangelicals generally are more aware of the problem than their counterparts in the 19th century and the first half of this century. Yet we still have a long way to go.

4. In the same way—my fourth point—we also have to give serious consideration to the question of separation. It cannot be denied that in our historical survey we often noticed separatist tendencies. Admittedly, it would be wrong to equate the ideas of 'ecclesiolae in ecclesia', of conventicles, of 'collegia pietatis', of societies, etc., with separation. In fact, most advocates of this kind of informal gathering of true believers were bitterly and violently opposed to the very idea of separation. Yet history also shows us that their efforts often ended either in frustration or in separation (followed by the formation of a new church, c.f. the Methodists). There are also Evangelicals who follow the Anabaptist line of thought and Consciously defend the idea of Separation. Alfred F. Kuen, e.g., in his book *I will build my church*, categorically states that all attempts to revive the multitudinist churches and to transform them gradually into churches of professing believers have failed.<sup>27</sup> He, therefore, calls for 'regrouping the true believers'.<sup>28</sup> But will not this course of action lead to an endless proliferation of new churches and denominations? I believe we have to make a serious study of both separation and separatism.<sup>29</sup>

5. Likewise—my fifth and last point—we have to make a serious study of *church discipline*. There can be no doubt that the New Testament requires such a discipline, There can be no doubt either that all Reformers, both the main and the radical Reformers, advocated it. Of the Anabaptists this is well known. Menno Simons wrote: 'A Church without the practice of genuine apostolic excommunication would be like a town without ramparts, or barriers, a field without enclosure, a p. 55 house without doors or walls'.<sup>30</sup> Calvin also was a strong advocate of ecclesiastical discipline. In some Reformed confessions it was even mentioned as the third mark of the true church.<sup>31</sup> But Luther

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<sup>25</sup> J. F. Gerhard Goettters, a.o. (eds), *Bekenntnisse der Kirche*, 1970, 282.

<sup>26</sup> Gervase E. Duffield, 'New Evangelical Impetus in England', *International Reformed Bulletin*, No. 19 (October 1964), 13f.

<sup>27</sup> Kuen, *op. cit.*, 330.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>29</sup> For an initial attempt, see my *Reformation Today*, 109–124.

<sup>30</sup> See J. Lecler, *Toleration and Reformation*, 1960, 1, 212.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Belgic confession, art. 29—'The marks by which the true Church is known are these: If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, if church discipline is exercised in punishing sin; in short, if all things are managed



also strongly advocated it. In two works published in 1539 and 1540 he included it among the seven marks of the visible church! In all Reformation churches it has actually been practised in both the 16th and 17th centuries. From the 18th century onward the larger churches became very lax on this point. Today it is virtually non-existent in the mainline denominations. Evangelicals, belonging to these churches, often acquiesce in this situation. Admittedly, it is a very difficult point. It may be true that it is almost impossible to revive it in today's amorphous churches. Still we should at least reflect upon it and ask ourselves what ought to be done and what can be done. And it may be good for us to remember that, as Dean M. Kelly has pointed out, discipline or 'strictness' has always been characteristic of virtually all significant and society-transforming religious movements.<sup>32</sup>

## EPILOGUE

Allow me to make a few concluding remarks. I realize that what I have said may at times have sounded rather negative. But I am afraid that this could not be avoided. The history of Evangelicalism does show quite a few negative aspects as far as the doctrine of the church is concerned. Yet I also realize that what I have said is not the whole story by far. There are other aspects which also must be mentioned. Not everything is negative. One could also defend the thesis that the evangelical movement was and is a movement of protest against the decline of the historical churches. One could see it, e.g., as a protest against the spiritual and missionary indolence of the churches, against the rigid structures of the churches, against the clericalistic attitude of many church leaders, etc. But all this does not alter the fact that as Evangelicals we are often woefully weak in our ecclesiology and that it is high time for us to start asking ourselves what our own attitude ought to be and what we can do to bring the church back to a new openness and a new submission to the Word of God. **P. 56**

I am convinced that it is *not enough* for us to pray for a *revival*. Of course, we should do that too. Revival is necessary indeed. It points to the divine dimension, the mighty work of God the Holy Spirit. It shows us that in the final analysis the healing of the church is God's work. It also reminds us of our own utter dependence upon God. We cannot revive and renew the church. Only God can do it. And yet revival is not the only word to be said here. We also need the word *reformation*. The Holy Spirit in his reviving activity does not exclude human activity, but rather takes it into his service. What we need are men and women who are willing to be used by the Spirit and who are willing to transform their own lives and the life of their church. Yes, we need both revival and reformation.

It will be clear that in using the word 'reformation' I do not mean a simple return to the 16th century. Apart from the fact that such a return is impossible, it would also be wrong. It would not be reformation, but restoration and repristination. I mean 'reformation' in the sense of the famous phrase: 'Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda' a re-formed church must continually be re-formed. What I mean, therefore, is a renewal of the church of *today*, taking into full account the situation and problems of this day and trying to find new ways to make the church again what it ought to be according to the New Testament: 'the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth' ([1 Tim. 3:15](#)). This can be done only when we are really willing

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according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the Church'. See Cochrane, *op. cit.*, 210.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Dean M. Kelly, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing*, 1972.



to listen to what the Lord in his Word has to say to us in our day. At this point I would like to recall the well-known words which John Robinson said to the Pilgrim Fathers in 1690: 'I am absolutely convinced that the Lord has other truths to impart to us through his Holy Word'. He then went on to warn against pure traditionalism. 'The Lutherans can see only what Luther saw; they would die rather than accept a certain aspect of the truth revealed to Calvin. As for the Calvinists, they cling to the heritage left them by that great man of God, who, nevertheless, did not know everything'.<sup>33</sup> As Evangelicals too we are often inclined to cling to our own traditions and to judge others by them. Likewise we often judge the churches to which we belong by the same standards. And in the meantime we go our own individualistic ways, ignoring our calling to work towards the reformation of the church.

I am very happy indeed that Evangelicals are waking up to this calling. Perhaps we do not yet know what we ought to do. But the main thing for the moment is the realization that we have to act. Some p. 57 people believe that we have to wait for a crisis before we can act. I beg to disagree with this. If we are waiting for a crisis before we act, the crisis may never come, because crises only come when the trends of the day are opposed by action.<sup>34</sup> We must not sit down and wait in an attitude of mere passivity. Let us be active in obedience, having a strong confidence in the Lord. We are not alone. He will guide us by his Spirit. We have his promises which are sure. If only, yes, if only we on our side, obey his word and do what He tells us in his Word! May the Lord give us the grace to be obedient without question, to be confident without doubt, to go forward without hesitation!

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# The Church in Papua New Guinea Change and Continuity

Joshua Daimoi

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*The author gives a helpful survey of the tension between change and continuity in the life of the emerging churches in a newly independent country whose society is confronted with enormous social, religious and political pressures. He has some perceptive comments on the shift in role of the western missionary from being a participant to becoming a spectator.*

(Editor)

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. Kuen, *op. cit.*, 314.

<sup>34</sup> Taken from a statement of one of the Leicester Conferences in the sixties. Cf. my *Reformation Today*, 143.