

THE EXAMINER



Published by the Winter Park church of Christ
Meeting at: 2122 Market Street; Wilmington NC 28403
www.winterparkcocnc.com

Vol. 12, No. 9

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June 2nd, 2024

Can We Know the Origin of Denominationalism? - By William C. Sexton, St. Joseph, Missouri

I began this series of articles (more than a year ago) with a quotation from a person who indicated that he was confused but was interested in finding the truth if such could be found. That quote was, "There are so many religions, and they all think that they are the right one . . ." We have cast each article in the form of a question, hoping that it would be a challenge to each of us to search for the truth, for I am confident that the truth is obtainable, if man will be moved to seek it. We have noticed several aspects of the problem, different things related to the subject.

Now I would like, after having noticed many scriptural truths on the positive side, to turn to something that we see around us. Denominationalism is here and, I am afraid, "to stay" till the Lord comes, when it shall be destroyed. (Matt. 15:13.) Born into such an atmosphere, many are tempted to think "that it must be right," because there are so many "good people in it," My question: "Can we know where the religious bodies of today came from?" I affirm that we can, and that we need to know, before we decide if denominationalism is good or bad. Let us turn our thinking to another matter for a moment and see if we cannot grasp a lesson by analogy. Take the field of

government. There are many governments in existence today. Question: Are we being logical, if we suggest that all must be good because so many people are in them? I doubt if you will so conclude. By noticing history, we can learn from whence all these governments came, can we not? Also, we can learn what concepts gave rise to them and what benefits are derived from being a part of them, etc.

Denominationalism, its origin and development, I affirm is as easy to find as that of government. It is even more important, because it affects the soul, the inward man, whereas government has to do with the physical man. We start with the New Testament. It reveals to us what was established and sustained in the first seventy years or so after Christ's resurrection. From it we notice the following:

I. The Apostasy Predicted Came!

Many are the scriptures that tell of a turning away from the truth and accepting something else; that such would come after the day of the apostles. I'll list these scriptures here, then make some general summary remarks on them. I encourage you to become acquainted with them. Study them and commit them to memory, at least be able to find and use them. They

are Acts 20:28-31; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; 1 Tim. 4:1-6; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 4:1-5. From these passages we can easily see that men in the eldership were to rise up speaking perverse things, with the aim of drawing away disciples after them. Before Christ returns some were to fall away and the "man of sin" was to develop one sitting in the place of God. Men were to "depart from the faith," speaking doctrines that had their origin with others than the God of heaven. Marriage and the eating of meats were to be among those things changed from God's will. Dangerous times were to come, persons having a "form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." Faithful men of God were to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, while some would not be satisfied with the truth and would gather to themselves teachers who would teach them what they wanted to hear. These would turn away "from the truth" and accept something called "fables."

My faith is strengthened at times, as I reflect upon the sad situation of religion - so much division and evil among religious people - to realize that God saw it beforehand, warning us that such would happen. He did not make it happen, but looking down the stream of time, He saw it and told us. Those who are concerned can know why we have the conditions that exist today, and save themselves by the blood of Christ; others will ignore it and go their merry way. Although I am sad because of the great loss of souls, I know that the Lord has done His part and made it possible for men to be saved.

Our history books tell us that these very things we have noticed from the scriptures did happen. Men entered the

church who were not perhaps fully dedicated to the Lord, while others rose seeking to be leaders. The desire for power and personal glory led men to do something different from what was established by the Lord and His apostles.

The departure was as Paul said it would be among the elders, or bishops, pastors. These terms were applied to the same men in the scriptures, but they were changed to designate different offices. Some men were elevated above others; where the scriptures place men, a plurality, over a congregation, man placed congregations under a man. Elders were to be governed by the holy scriptures, but bishops began to meet and formulate doctrine. Their word became authoritative.

These men who had taken on this authority began to meet and decide doctrine. When problems would develop, men would come together and discuss the matter and make a decision and then bind it on the brotherhood; their decision became law. It is easy to see that once this was started, it would grow, and not recede. This provided man with a place to compete for glory and power. Thus over a period of years it grew into a monstrosity.

II. The Development of Catholicism

In 325 A. D. several of these men who had taken on this authority, the Lord had not given it to them or any men, met in Nicaea to discuss a matter that was causing some concern. The nature of Christ and His relationship to the Father was the subject. After discussion, they wrote their decision and it became law. What the scriptures said on the matter was law, and should have been adequate - they should have studied the

scriptures and been satisfied with them. But they were not, so they wrote their law, and this became a precedent and opened the way for an overall change. When such a law was written, naturally there would be some who would not accept that decision, thus they were called a "faction." To designate those who would follow the law written by the men the name "Catholic" was used for the universal church. This identified the ones who accepted the bishop's decisions.

This grew, till in 606 A. D. one man, the bishop of Rome, was declared to be the POPE - bishop of the whole church. By the bishop being from Rome, some would not accept his rule; to designate those who did, they were called "Roman Catholic." This in fact was a contradiction, Rome meaning local, Catholic meaning universal. But it was truly descriptive of them, for it was a local church over a universal church. For the next eight hundred years, this body grew and developed into a world power. The corruption grew with its power. This corruption was great enough to sicken men like Martin Luther to vomit; the ejection of this poisonous matter was essential to the spiritual survival of this man and his religion. There was no resemblance between what now existed, the Roman Catholic Church, and that which the Lord had established 1500 years before.

III. Unrest Produced Protestantism

Anyone looking back to the teaching and practice of the 15th and 16th centuries of Roman Catholicism, can see the corruption. Martin Luther, who was a priest in the Catholic Church, sought to change the corrupt Church's course He issued a challenge to examine

self and the scriptures. He had no thought of starting another church, rather he directed men back to the Bible. But instead of changing, the Pope tried to discipline him and stop his mouth. But the corruption was so great they could not stop him; they excommunicated him, but he went on preaching - showing what the Bible taught, asking men and women to accept its teachings and be governed by them, and cast off the corrupt practices. Many did just that.

Now let us pause for a moment and notice that at that time, none of the modern day denominations was in existence. The name "Catholic" had been applied long after the completion of the New Testament. Luther did not want his followers to be called "Lutherans." He said, "I pray you to leave my name alone, and call not yourselves Lutherans, but Christians." (The Life of Luther by Stork, p. 289.) He desired that they follow Christ, not Luther. Yet, after his death those affected by his teachings began to be called "Lutherans." Later they developed differences and divided, so today there are many different "Lutheran Churches."

Now a question for all who might still be confused regarding the origin of denominationalism: Did you ever read of the "Lutheran Church" in your Bible? Did you ever read of the "Catholic Church" in your Bible? No, you never did! Then where did such come from? If they didn't come from the scriptures, they were invented by men.

Now, let us grant that these churches teach some things found in the Bible, yet they all have one thing that separates each of them - a different

name and one that is not found in the scriptures. Lutherans won't be called Catholics, neither will Catholics be called Lutherans. But would either be offended by, or refuse to be called, the name "Christian"? "Christian" is scriptural; these others are not. (**Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16.**) What if we went to the Bible for the name? Could we not all agree?

Now we need to advance one step further in our study to see fully the origin and development of denominationalism. After Luther was disturbed by the teaching and practices of the Catholic Church, and broke with them when they would not respond favorably to his challenge to return to the scriptures, others also became dissatisfied and raised their voices. A point worth noticing, I believe, is this: As Luther was dissatisfied with certain aspects of the corruption, others would be disturbed by other aspects. This seems to be natural. One's attention is attracted by one thing, while another's is attracted by still another. So as others began to examine the scriptures, and the Catholic practices, they were alarmed by other points. Different men began to teach and emphasize certain scriptural points, different groups developed, all of them protesting some Catholic practice, thus the principles set in motion developed into what we see today. Each particular denomination can be traced back to its beginning in history.

Now our point is this: Seeing that the apostasy came as predicted and denominationalism developed out of the apostasy, we contend that we can go back to the beginning before either the apostasy or the reformation, by a restoration, and be called Christians, reject all the names of men, have the worship of the New Testament church, reject all that has been brought in by men, have the same simple congregational organization of the New Testament, and reject all that has been developed by men.

Yes, we can KNOW the origin of denominationalism; it is of man and not God, therefore shall be "rooted up" because God has not planted it. (**Matt. 15:13.**) What shall we do about the situation? How shall we use this knowledge? Shall we make our contribution toward a restoration of New Testament religion, or say, "Well, it is just too hard, I can't do anything about it"?

Beloved, my appeal is this: Christ loved the church enough to give Himself for it. (**Eph. 5:25.**) He is going to save the church He purchased with His blood. (**Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23-27.**) You can be a part of it and reap the benefits of His death, and if you will do your duty, you can very likely help others to know and find courage to be saved, too. The opportunity is yours, act now while you still have time. The night cometh when no man can work! — **Via The Apostolic Doctrine - Vol 10 Number 1 - 1969 Temple Terrace Florida —**

“HISTORY IS EITHER A WONDERFUL INSTRUCTOR

or

A CRUEL TEACHER” - {JC}

For those WHO REFUSE TO LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES OF THE PAST ARE DOOMED TO REPEAT THEM” - Don't be foolish in your study of God's Word - seek for the truth and it will be found!