

CHAPTER III

THE LITTLE FLOCK AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHURCH

The Church in the Prophecies of Jesus

If we look at his prophetic statements, there are some in which the church, or rather, what we know as the church, must have been in his mind, even though there is no specific reference to the term. Some of these are listed here to show how keen was his insight into the future. The "narrow door" utterance comes first to mind:

And someone said to him, Lord, will those who are saved be few? and he said to them, Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. (Luke 13:23,24)

We have here a clear reference to the doorway into salvation. Now where, I ask you, are the "many" who are seeking to enter into this door, if not in the church? And note it well, they are not only seeking to enter, but they shall not be able! This prophecy bodes not well, then, for those who are only members of the churches.

Then there are the "false prophet" prophecies:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. (Matthew 23:11)

For false Christs and false prophets shall arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead many astray, if possible, even the elect. (Mat. 24:24)

Again, where, I ask you, are the "many false prophets" if not in church? These prophecies and many others are thoroughly consistent with the church as we perceive it today, containing a vast multitude who are seeking to enter, and who will not be able because they have turned a cold shoulder to the spoken entreaties of their only Lord and Savior by refusing to hear him and take him seriously; containing also a multitude of prophets, in all kinds of clothing, including sheep's clothing, who are to be judged false prophets because they have not truly spoken the Word of our Lord.

Whence, Then, Came the Church?

Christendom is the triumph of Judaism over paganism, and the local church is the Gentiles' synagogue. This statement defines the essence of the church and characterizes its development. I have arrived at this conclusion after a careful study of the beginnings of the church, both as related in the New Testament and from other historical sources, and by recognizing that it cannot be the true institutional representative of Jesus for the reasons explained above. Specifically:

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- it does not manifest the administration authorized by him and
- it does not take the forms prophesied by him. But most important,
- it does not listen to him.

This latter is conclusive evidence, for he has assured us that his sheep hear his voice. This must be the telling characteristic of the Little Flock. What follows is one explanation of how the prophecies of Jesus came to be fulfilled in the world.

The Jewish Priority

Let us acknowledge that Jesus was a Jew and that he confined his ministry to the Jewish nation, saying:

I was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. (Matthew 15:24)

It seems obvious that his heart's desire was, first, to convert the entire Jewish nation and then, through them, to present the Word to the world. I believe he first anticipated the conversion of the Gentiles as a conversion to his refined Judaism. He first looked around and about upon his countrymen and said,

Behold, the fields are white unto harvest. (John 4:35)

But they did not respond. First, his family rejected him; then his hometown rejected him; finally, his nation rejected him. And he came to realize that:

A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. (Mark 6:4)

The Rejection of the Jews

Near the end, in great disappointment and grief, he recognized that his hopes for his nation were not to be realized, that it was their leaders who would instigate his crucifixion. At that point, after that realization, he announced that the Jewish nation had lost the kingdom because of their lack of response to his Word of Truth (Matthew 21:43). Their great city was to be utterly destroyed because:

You did not know the time of your visitation. (Luke 19:44)

It then became, for him, but one nation among the many of the world. He foretold their national destruction, which occurred in 70 AD. Blindly clinging to the Old Covenant, they rejected the New, and were themselves rejected. Jesus thereafter placed the entire burden for the extension of the Gospel of the Kingdom on the shoulders of those few who comprised the original "Little Flock." They were to wait for the Spirit, than to go out into the world and preach the gospel to every creature under heaven. Whoever responded, whether Jew or Gentile, would be added to the Little Flock and thus they would spread out into the world and capture men and women from every nation, including the Jews. But the Jews as a nation no longer occupied any place in the Kingdom. It was taken away from them and given to the Little Flock (Matthew 21:43). As individuals, they now come on the same basis as individuals from every nation under heaven, but as a nation they have no standing in the Kingdom.

Antisemitism

At this point I must emphasize that the Jews of the world do not bear any particular responsibility or guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus. They are not thereby guilty of deicide or any other national

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crime, any more than the citizens of modern Rome are culpable. Remember, it was the Roman representatives who both passed the sentence of death and carried it to completion. It is true that some Jews cried out, "His blood be upon us and upon our children!" But Jesus cried out in their behalf: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do!" And the Lord said through the prophet, Jeremiah,

In those days they shall no longer say, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." But every one shall die for his own sin; each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge. (Jeremiah 31:29,30; see also Ezekiel 18:1-4)

No, there is not nor has there ever been an ongoing national culpability of the Jews because of their forefather's rejection and crucifixion of Jesus. We are each judged strictly as individuals for our own deeds. So, on those individuals who sought and achieved his crucifixion, both Roman and Jewish, rests the blood of Jesus, and for them Jesus pled forgiveness. What the Jews as a nation lost by the rejection of Jesus was the Kingdom of God and their privileged status as the sons of the kingdom, a loss that was sealed by the end of their national sovereignty in AD 70. There is absolutely no justification for the perverse anti-Semitism of Gentiles that has created so much grief through the centuries and, in our own century, the Nazi Holocaust. Anti-Semitism is barbarism and it is always fueled by the love of life.

The Early Disciples

All the first disciples were Jews, since Jesus had confined his ministry to that nation. They continued, immediately after his death, to operate under the impress of his earlier instructions by confining their ministry to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." There were about a hundred and twenty of them, all Jews, on the Day of Pentecost. Then the Holy Spirit fell on them, again exclusively on Jews, and about three thousand souls were added to their numbers. Although they soon began to be excluded from the synagogues, they nevertheless aspired to remain attached to Judaism. Their ministry in Jerusalem was focused on the Temple area, where they were witnessing to Jews. When they spread outside the city, they went as Jews to the outlying synagogues to address their message. They were amazed when, at Antioch, the Holy Spirit first fell on Gentiles, and their acceptance of this event was most reluctant. Peter required a special vision to convince him that Gentiles were acceptable, and the record from those days indicated that the disciples at Jerusalem were never acclimated to the acceptance of the Gentiles. The Jews had always been accepting of Gentiles who converted to Judaism. This required, however, that the converts take on all the trapping of the Jews, beginning with circumcision, but some were accepting them on the basis of unacceptable standards: they were not required to be circumcised! The Jews as a nation could not accept Jesus; now even the Jewish converts to Jesus were being rejected by their Jewish brethren as heretics.

A New Sect of Judaism

What sort of people were the apostles seeking to add to the nation of Israel? We need only note that the Jews were uniquely monotheistic; they led a precarious existence in the midst of a polytheistic, pagan world. Therefore, when the Gentiles began to be added to the church, they were converting from polytheism to the monotheism of the Jews. This resulted in their being considered as Jews by their Gentile neighbors so that the earliest Gentile converts to Christianity were equated with the Jews by other Gentiles but among the Jews they were heretics. So the new movement struggled to gain a foothold in the Jewish nation and the world, but came to be considered heretical by the Jews, and Jewish by the world. But of great importance is the fact that they considered themselves Jews who had added Jesus as a new dimension to their faith. **The earliest disciples of Jesus then constituted a new sect of Judaism.**

The early church was therefore from the outset grappling with an identity crisis. As Jews they

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accepted Jesus as the promised Jewish messiah while retaining all their devotion to the faith of their forebears. They were increasingly involved in a struggle with their kinsmen because the bulk of the Jews, not accepting Jesus as messiah, considered them to be heretics. More and more they were expelled from the synagogues, as Jesus had prophesied, and found themselves forming their own associations, which typically met in homes. In time, they organized their assemblies and began to apply the term *ekklesia* to them. It was a common term, as we have already seen, in general use to define any assembly of persons. It was natural that they should administer the *ekklesia* just as the synagogue had been administered, for they knew no calling to belong to anything other than a synagogue. It was what they knew and understood. The movement spread outside Jerusalem and Jews in many other cities were converted to a belief in Jesus as the Messiah on the strength of the apostles' testimony. Every where, however, they maintained their Jewish identity. If allowed to do so, they maintained their relationship with the synagogue. Otherwise they formed separate assemblies, which they conceived according to the pattern of the synagogue.

We must acknowledge that we are considering the organizational activities of people who, in most cases, never knew Jesus personally and never heard him speak. For their knowledge of the Word, they were dependent on the apostles and earliest disciples, who were heavily influenced by Jesus' early focus on the Jewish nation. They remembered the substance of his sayings, and later had them recorded, but during the first formative years of their *ekklesia* they may have depended on an oral tradition. Thus, they failed to listen carefully enough to the accounts of his sayings to realize his provision for their administration. They did not realize they were on their own as far as God was concerned. They could not believe that their venerable and ancient tradition had been cast out and that the Kingdom had been taken away from the Jewish nation. They struggled, therefore, to remain Jews while becoming Christians. And, perhaps most important, they continued to honor the sacred scriptures of the Jews, the Old Testament. It was their only scriptural guide.

The above also applies to the results of Paul's work among the Gentiles. He first went to the synagogue to present the Gospel as he understood it. Usually some Jews were receptive, but most turned against him with the results as described above. He then turned his focus on the Gentiles. But Paul also was a Jew, an "Hebrew of the Hebrews" who never gave up the hope of the full inclusion of his nation in the Kingdom. His work was so very important that I have devoted a large part of this book to him and we need not discuss it here.

The early Christians held in common the belief in their Jewish messiah, the Gospel as preached about him by the apostles, and a common devotion to the Hebrew scriptures and traditions, including the Law, and to the one God. In general, they failed to acknowledge and follow the distinctive instructions of the Lord because they had only the oral tradition. I have found no evidence that the apostles gave prime attention to the utterances of the Lord, and their converts would not likely do so.

Thus, as the movement spread, it was in essence an expansion of Hebrew religion into the polytheistic world, distinguished by a belief that Jesus was the messiah. Its victory, which followed on the conversion of Constantine three centuries after the crucifixion, was therefore the triumph of Judaism over paganism. It carried with it:

- the Passover feast redefined as the Eucharist; it carried with it the Jewish messiah, identified as Jesus; it carried with it
- the administrative forms of the synagogue;
- it carried with it the Decalogue and the inspired scriptures of the Jews, claiming to be its true interpreters;
- it carried with it the Jewish Sabbath, eventually modified to the first day;

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- it carried with it the atoning sacrifice;
- it carried with it a patriarchy after the Jewish pattern. So, on and on we could go, identifying the elements of the church that were derived from Judaism. Perhaps of most importance,
- it carried with it, into the pagan world, a belief in the one God of the Jews (later modified to accommodate the Trinity).

So, as the church moved out into the world, expanding and conquering, it eventually became the behemoth we see today – the triumph of Judaism over paganism, in which the local church is but the synagogue of the Gentiles.

Identifying the Little Flock

The "Little Flock" was always there. It existed wherever there were those who "loved not their lives unto death" (Revelation 12:11).

It existed whenever anyone listened carefully to the Good Shepherd. It surely included the holy martyrs, beginning with Stephen. It surely included all those individuals, whoever they were, who persevered in keeping the utterances of Jesus substantially intact as an oral tradition for perhaps a generation. My thinking allows for the possibility that there were much earlier written versions of the utterances of Jesus, but a crucifixion date of 30 AD and the date of the writing of Mark's gospel, probably the first one written, of 65 AD leaves a probable span of thirty-five to forty years during which the Word, insofar as we can determine, was preserved primarily by the oral tradition. Those words were so unique, so powerful, and so offensive to the world that only the sheep of the Good Shepherd could endure to keep them alive. It is a miracle of the Holy Spirit that those words, hated by the world and even by churchmen, have been preserved. We have no good reason to doubt their validity because they define principles founded on the hatred of life, to which the world is hostile, and no ordinary man or woman would have conceived them.

An Identity Crisis

The fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 AD was a traumatic experience and a pivotal time in the history of the Christian fellowship. It is no accident that the earliest Gospels, containing the Logos, were written about this time as the early Christians began to realize that they were not, after all, Jews, and that they no longer had a political entity with which to identify. This forced upon them a new crisis of identity that they resolved by increasingly defining themselves as independent of Judaism. Still, they continued to maintain their devotion to the Hebrew scriptures, their synagogue-like administration and their monotheism that knew only the Jewish antecedent. Historical evidence (from Eusebius) indicates that, following the instructions of Jesus uttered many years earlier (Luke 21:21), they fled the city of Jerusalem prior to the Roman onslaught and took up residence east of the Jordan in the Perea city of Pella. Their abandonment of Jerusalem may have been the final straw that separated the young movement from Judaism, for the Jewish patriots who sought refuge within the city walls must have interpreted this to be a desertion under fire.

They retained another Jewish feature that they shared in common with the pagans as well – the belief in the sacrificial system. The Jews continued the sacrifices until the destruction of the Temple, but during the period prior to 70 AD the Christians, following the teaching of the Apostles and especially of Paul, accepted the interpretation of the crucifixion as that of an atoning sacrifice in which Jesus served as a paschal lamb, rendered to God as the just requirement for forgiveness of sins and in accord with many prophetic texts. This doctrine may well have been partially motivated by the loss of sacrificial privileges in the Temple when the Jews became hostile to them. Yet this is, above all others, the common element that continued to identify them

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with the Jews in the eyes of the world, and to distinguished them from the members of the Little Flock. The latter, listening to Jesus, would have early learned that no sacrifice was required, and that in his crucifixion Jesus was not making a sacrifice but rather was, first, demonstrating the Way by the exhibition of the hatred of life and second, ransoming the captives and defeating the evil one, thus establishing the kingdom on the earth. This also identified the *ekklesia* with the pagan world, for they, too, held to a sacrificial system. This identification, more than anything else, marks the church as essentially being one with the world. The only exceptions are those few, members of the Little Flock, who may or may not be associated with the churches and who are not depending on a sacrifice.

The process that established the church as an independent entity, seemingly separate from Judaism, was well established by the end of the first century. The dominant parties of the Jews had from the very beginning been hostile to Jesus. This hostility continued and grew during the Apostolic period, thus forcing the young church to seek an identity apart from an intimate relationship with Judaism. They then began to claim the Jewish scriptures for themselves and maintained that they were the new Israel and as such had supplanted the old Israel. In other words, they did not give up on becoming Jews, but since the Jews expelled them from the synagogues, they maintained that they carried the true essence of Judaism with them into the Gentile world. The ethnic Jews who refused to receive the apostolic message had rejected the promises of God and had themselves been rejected, or so the churchmen asserted. This conviction was, they thought, confirmed by the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. Thereafter, increasingly, the Christians viewed themselves as the true inheritors of the promises made through the prophets and Jesus, and the Jews as apostates who, by rejecting Jesus as messiah, had lost any claim to the promises of the Father. Their message appealed predominately to Gentiles and the result was a Gentile church that was viewed with hostility by the traditional Judaism and in return responded to the Jews with growing hostility of its own.

Since few of them were ethnic Jews, they spiritualized their identification as the new Israel. The Jewish sacrifice became the mystery of the atonement. The circumcision of the Jews became a circumcision of the heart. The descent from Abraham became that of the spiritual new birth through faith rather than a literal descent from generation to generation. They appropriated the traditional Jewish baptism ritual, applied to proselytes, and made it the mark of entry into their fellowships.

For nearly three hundred years the early Christians, following primarily Paul's leadership and that of his successors, expanded their movement throughout the Roman Empire, preaching a gospel that convinced people to trust in a sacrifice for their salvation. It was a thing that all understood, both Jew and Gentile, so it made a convenient point of contact with the Gentile world. But, having begun in a misguided fashion, under the impress of Judaism and sacrifice, they failed to realize in the larger association the expressions essential to the Little Flock as constituted by Jesus. Mixed in with them, there was nevertheless those individuals who found the grace to listen to the voice of Jesus, and who thus constituted the Little Flock, blended with the church and concealed thereby from history. Many showed their true devotion to The Father, manifested by the hatred of life, through the martyrdom they experienced during times of persecution by the World. Other multitudes, denying the Lord through deafness to this Word, nevertheless continued to constitute the body of the church and to misrepresent Christ to the world. These, misguided as they were as to the true import of the Gospel, found themselves involved in many foolish distractions, heresies, schisms, and in many barbaric acts, all because they could not bear to hear his voice. They appear to have loved their lives in this world.

From a common base that included the Hebrew scriptures, the monotheism of the Jews, and the sacrificial system and the messianic concept, the churchmen developed and deviated from the Jewish course because they were rejected by the Jews as heretics and because of their identification with the name, Christian. Nevertheless, they maintained their Jewish heritage and thus, in their conquest of the world, achieved the triumph of Judaism, or a form of Judaism, over

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paganism. This was no mean achievement, for it involved the overthrow of polytheism, which must have given them a supreme sense of accomplishment, leaving them with no reason to doubt that they were in the service of God.

The church struggled against great opposition during the pre-Constantinian period because, as a new entity, Christians were not recognized by the Empire. The Jews, on the other hand, were there before the Romans and had generally enjoyed certain privileges and the protection of the Emperor with some exceptions. This was not lost in consequence of the rebellions in AD 67-70 and AD 135, for those Jews of the Diaspora who maintained their communities throughout the Empire continued to be protected. During the first century the Christians tended to be identified with the Jews and to enjoy some degree of protection as a result. But when Jewish hostility forced them into a separate identification, they eventually lost their associated protection and entered into periods of persecution. The fact that the Christians prevailed and conquered the Empire without military action is testimony to a depth of conviction and perseverance unexcelled in history.

By the time of Constantine, they had accomplished much. They were still a minority, but may have constituted as much as ten percent of the population. Their churches were found throughout the Empire; their patriarchal system of administration was efficiently molding them into a unified force in spite of the numerous heresies that had arisen. The Arian controversy was raging at the very time that Constantine came on board and assayed to appropriate the church as a means of unifying his domain. The Council of Nicea, in AD 325, was assembled by the Emperor primarily to resolve this issue. It also afforded him the opportunity to assert his authority over the church and the world. The Christians wielded political power for the first time, and they slowly began to assert it in their relationships with the Jews. It is not surprising that, since they considered that they had supplanted Judaism, some would see themselves as God's instruments set to exterminate a faith that no longer, in their view, had a justified existence and that had become generally hostile to them. Thus arose in Christendom the evil leaven of anti-Semitism that found its most terrible expression in the "final solution" of the German National Socialists from 1932 until 1946. The conversion of Constantine and the consequent rise of the Christians to political power was a great disaster for the cause of Truth, for it placed Christians in a position of world power that their Lord never intended. The reformation did little if anything to resolve this incompatibility. **The Christians have ruled the world, but they have lost the Way.**

One would like to think that, even if the local church is only the synagogue of the Gentiles, it is at least a notch above the synagogues of the old Israel. This is not true, for in integrating with the world the church has made compromises so as to render it ineffective as a redemptive tool. This makes the church an effective trap. Baited by the promise of salvation, it lures in the multitudes then slams the door shut. They remain inside on the grounds of the conviction that they are saved and their sins are forgiven. Thus entrapped, they no more seek salvation, or they continue to seek it through the ministrations of the trap, and so their condemnation is assured. This is no excuse, however, for the Lord has kept his Word alive in their midst so that they must deal with it, either here or hereafter.

The Major Compromises

What are the compromises the church has made in its conquest of the world?

- First and foremost is the compromise with polytheism, a compromise that the synagogue has avoided to this day. As they expanded out into the world of the pagans, they found it not expedient to strictly maintain the Jewish devotion to the single God and effectively expanded the number to three – the Holy Trinity. This was the central issue at the Council of Nicea, and it was temporarily resolved by a compromise that, while asserting

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the unity of the one God in the godhead, nevertheless left him with three manifestations, a sort of theistic monstrosity, but one the pagans could appreciate.

- Next, the icons of Catholic and Orthodox Christianity represent a compromise with pagan idolatry.
- They also compromised, with both Jews and pagans, by their retention of the sacrificial system. I mean the interpretation of the crucifixion as a sacrifice for sin, with Jesus as the lamb of sacrifice.
- However, the deadliest compromise of all, one all persons can appreciate, was the compromise with the love of life. This issued in the radical misrepresentation of the Gospel that has undermined everything that might have been effective for salvation.

The result of all the compromises was that the church that had been built on the confession of Jesus as the Christ had, after all, rejected him, having replaced him with a tailor made messiah more to its liking. The synagogue first rejected Jesus by refusing to accept him as messiah, then the church rejected him by rejecting his Word, the Holy Logos of the Father, while nevertheless continuing to claim his name. Thus did the early churchmen again identify with the synagogue, and thus again was the church seen as the triumph, not of Christ over Caesar, but of Judaism over paganism. Christianity therefore stands before the Father under the same indictment as Judaism, that of having rejected Jesus as their messiah. They do this even while confessing his name. This, Judaism has not done and in this may after all be as true to the will of the Father as are the Gentiles of Christendom.

The Benefits

What benefit is the church to humanity? The temporal benefit is great, for without him we Gentiles might yet be offering sacrifices at the altars of Jupiter, Diana and Mithras. This overthrow of paganism was an achievement without precedent, and could never have been accomplished by original Judaism with its circumcision and exclusiveness.

Yes, and there has been much profit beyond that, for there is a remnant in Christendom that has not rejected The Holy Word, just as there was a faithful remnant of seven thousand in Israel when Elijah thought himself alone. This remnant constitutes the Little Flock of the Good Shepherd – those who, like sheep listening to the shepherd, have listened and heard the Holy Word of Jesus. They are always there, and so is his Word. There appears to be a paradox here.

How is it that the church, hating the words of the Lord and refusing to take them seriously in the application to life, has nevertheless contributed so much toward preserving them in the Gospels? I think the churchmen did it because they could not help themselves. Having planted the Word in the world at so great a cost, the Father will never permit it to be eradicated; therefore, as I have explained earlier, the Holy Spirit has always been active to protect and maintain the Word for the sake of the sheep of the Little Flock, those who are the fruition of all the Father's work and the consummation of his will: the resurrection to Glory. I have sought a metaphor to explain this phenomena in other terms, and the following seems to serve my purpose.

A Metaphor

AIDS is a terrible malady. When the virus is discovered to be causing ones illnesses, it is a disaster to the lover of life for the illness eventually issues in death, there being no known

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remedy. Some persons, however, are found to carry the virus who have no symptoms. They are deemed "carriers," and they may live for years and suffer no ill effects, even eventually dying of other causes. They cannot by any means rid themselves of it. They may unwittingly infect others, who succumb. So it is in the Kingdom of God. The Truth, implanted in the church by Jesus, abides as does the virus in the carrier. Therefore, the church is a carrier of the Truth, yet without symptoms. Every individual within the church who knows the Truth and does not abide by it, who does not love God so as to hate the life in this world, is a carrier.

The carriers all hate the Truth, just as the AIDS carrier hates the virus and hopes it will not destroy the life on earth. But, like the AIDS carrier, there is no remedy; there is nothing they can do to rid themselves of this virus, this Truth. And, scattered about in the midst of the carriers there are those, devout disciples of Jesus, who not only carry the Truth, they live by it, and therefore, they die by it, for they are "infected" to the point of death. As Jesus has firmly explained,

He who loves his life loses it; but he who hates his life in this world will keep it for life eternal (John 12:25).

Stephen, the Christian martyr, was the first one, after the Lord, to succumb to the Truth virus. It is therefore a terrible malady from the point of view of the life lover; it is a fatal, hopeless disease inimical to life on earth. Men hate the Truth for the same reason they hate the AIDS virus: it threatens the life of everyone it touches; and in the past two thousand years, beginning with Jesus, it has taken the lives of many thousands, devout servants of God who suffered the pangs of physical death rather than deny their Lord.

The carriers of Truth, the churchmen, no more like to be carriers than do the carriers of the AIDS virus like their own unhappy condition, for they can never know when it may become aggressively active within them, become even fatal. However, there is nothing they can do, for there is no remedy; the Kingdom of God has come; all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him with whom we all must ultimately deal, and he exercises it to the end that, though heaven and earth pass away, his Holy Word, his Truth, will not pass away! The Word is indeed life threatening as history abundantly testifies, and there is no remedy!

Another Metaphor

This one gives further insight into the status of the church in the world through the centuries. Moses is reckoned the first man through whom God made his words known in the world. Then came Jesus, that "prophet like unto Moses" (Deuteronomy 18:15f) who, like Moses, made known the words of God to man. Just as Jesus, through his words, has been preserved in the world by a church that is his enemy, so Moses was nurtured in his world by the house of Pharaoh, who had sought to kill him together with all the first born of the children of Israel in Egypt. Moses, the savior of the Hebrews who delivered them from Egypt, was protected and nurtured by him who had decreed his death; likewise Jesus, as his Holy Word, the savior of all the children of God who delivers us from this present age, has been protected and nurtured in the world by an institution of the world that, could the facts be acknowledged, would have destroyed him as soon as he was born!

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has throughout been concerned with four categories of mankind:

- (1) the Gentiles;

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- (2) the Jews;
- (3) the Church; and
- (4) the Little Flock.

These, when summed, encompass the whole of humanity. To understand their inter-relationships and the purposes they have served in the divine plan, we need to look to the ultimate purposes of The Father as revealed in Jesus. This has been defined in the first volume, *Jesus, the Rock of Offense*, and reviewed in *Book I* of this volume. Let us sketch it here briefly again, and relate it to the church, the Jews, and the Little Flock as set forth herein.

The Purpose of the Creation

First of all, recall that the purpose of the Father in creating was and is that he might populate his Glory with like minded children. The will of the Father is the resurrection to Glory of his children. He chose to realize this through the creation and the consequent evolutionary process of which we human beings are the culmination. We evolved through the creative processes, and this means that we have an historical development in every phase of our being: physical, mental, biological, volitional, moral, and spiritual. It follows that there was an early time in our development when our ancestors were so spiritually and intellectually undeveloped as to be completely in ignorance of God, even as the dumb beasts today. Then, as they developed, they learned to understand and explain simple things in a manner that had meaning to them, in their relative darkness. They became superstitious; it was a giant advance in their understanding of themselves and their world. They applied supernatural explanations to all events they could not otherwise explain, and eventually came to believe in spirits, ghosts, demons, and gods.

I believe that at this point in their early development some of our ancestors, of whom Adam and Eve are the archetypes, became "living souls," invested with the freedom of the will, when the Father "breathed into their nostrils the breath of life." They then ate the forbidden fruit, becoming knowledgeable of good and evil; thereafter they had understanding sufficient to warrant their being held accountable for their actions and attitudes and were no more innocent. They were invested with the freedom of the will. Their progress had brought them to the point where they had the capacity to know God. But they yet did not know him.

Now, the Father's love encompasses the world, the whole of humanity from beginning to end. He looks longingly down upon us from his glorious habitation and would draw all to himself, exactly like the father in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. But he can do nothing that would compromise the freedom of the will, for it is his will that his children come to him with this freedom intact and secure. Therefore the freedom of the will is, from the Father's perspective, inviolate. If any one of us is to rise to his eternal Glory, it must be because that one wants to do so, precisely as the Prodigal came to himself and wanted to return to his father's house. The Father can reason with us; he can explain and attempt to persuade, he can and does impose limits; but he can not, he will not, coerce. How, then, can he proceed to realize his will and purpose for us while we remain in love with the life of this age?

Getting Our Attention

The first thing he must do is get our attention. Since the freedom of the will is individually based, he must first get the attention of some individual. Through that individual he must then get the attention of other individuals, and through them, yet others. As we consider this process we may at once realize that the most promising way to do this is to work through one of the more developed individuals. The revelation would then be transferred to his children, then through their children in turn, for the parents greatest influence will be upon their children. This process does not occur in a vacuum; the chosen ones (chosen to know the one God), are immersed in a sea of

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darkened humanity having its own powerful influence on them from generation to generation. The children of those who have known God must somehow be protected from the perversions of the world, or the knowledge of God will be lost. This is precisely what has occurred in the Father's dealing with the Jews.

The first individual to know God must have been Abram. Or, perhaps it was his parent, Terah, who first undertook to journey with all his household, including his son, Abram, and Abram's wife, Sarai, from Ur toward the promised land of Canaan. He settled instead at Haran, and there he died at the scriptural age of two hundred and five years. We do not know what motivated Terah; why he undertook to journey to Canaan, or why he settled at Haran. Had God also spoken to him? Did he expend all his energy and resources getting to Haran?

There is no doubt about what motivated Abram to continue the journey began by the parent.

Now the Lord said to Abram, Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing; I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves (Genesis 12:1-3).

From this, as anyone can plainly see, as of first importance is that Abram was chosen, not for his sake alone, or for his family's sake, or his progeny forever, but that all the families of the earth should come to be blessed, or to bless themselves by him. Thus the Father claimed Abram's attention, and he obeyed the Lord and resumed the journey begun by Terah. Taking all his possessions – Sarai his wife (and half sister), Lot his nephew, all their possessions and the persons of their household, he moved on to Canaan where the Lord appeared to him a second time.

The Lord said to him, To your descendants I will give this land (Genesis 12:7). There Abram built an altar, but he pressed on, because there was a famine in the land (Genesis 12:10).

Passing through the Negeb, he went all the way to Egypt. There, for the first time, we see the religiously primitive state of Abram's character. Like everyone else among our forebears, he loved his life and did not want to lose it, but he feared the Egyptians would kill him for Sarai, for she was very beautiful. Therefore, he concocted a plan, saying to Sarai,

Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared on your account (Genesis 12:13).

Abram then cut a sharp deal with Pharaoh, who saw Sarai and wanted her for himself, for Abram immediately come into the possession of sheep, oxen, he-asses, menservants, maidservants, she-asses, and camels, and Sarai entered into the house of Pharaoh. But afflictions and plagues came upon the house of Pharaoh because of Sarai. He learned that Sarai was really Abram's wife and feared to keep her. Because of the plagues, he returned her to Abram, saying, What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me she was your wife? Why did you say, "She is my sister," so that I took her for my wife? Now then, here is your wife, take her and be gone (Genesis 12:18,19). And guess what? Pharaoh set him on the way, with his wife and all that he had! So it was that Abram kept his life, retrieved his wife, and gained wealth in the deal so that he left Egypt a rich man and returned to Canaan, to the place where he had built an altar.

Back in Canaan, The Lord again spoke to him saying,

Lift up your eyes, and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your descendants for ever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if

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one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you (Genesis 13:14-17).

Now, Abram was becoming an old man, and remained childless. Then the Lord came to him in a vision and he pled his case with the Lord, complaining that he had no son for an heir. Then the Lord said to him,

Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them. So shall your descendants be.

Then, suddenly, one of the greatest spiritual breakthroughs in history:

He (Abram) believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him again and established a covenant with him. First he changed his name from Abram to Abraham; he also changed Sarai's name to Sarah, and reiterated his promise that Abraham should bear a son by Sarah. Also, at this point, he established as a mark of the covenant the rite of circumcision.

Why did the Lord do this strange thing? If he did not want men to have foreskins, why did he create them with foreskins? In retrospect, his reason seems obvious. It was in order to insure that Abraham's offspring would remain distinct from the other nations of the world. It was a peculiar mark that each parent would bestow upon the male infants as they were born, according to the covenant with the Lord. It would distinguish them from all other people and bind them together into a unique and peculiar people, in order to preserve the knowledge of the Lord that had been granted to them through Abraham, and later, the prophets and other oracles of the Lord. Without this physical distinction, subsequent generations would doubtless have blended with other peoples and the covenant would have been lost.

To put this all in perspective, we should acknowledge that in this man the Father had chosen a polytheistic polygamist and slave holder, a man who was in the process of offering his young son as a burnt offering according to pagan custom, when something happened inside him. Perhaps it was the awfulness of what he was doing that stripped the shackles from his mind and soul. Whatever it was, it resulted in his giving his attention to God. Probably for the first time, the Father truly had the attention of a man.

The Work of Jesus

Abraham's son, his only son Isaac, who was saved from the altar of sacrifice was also a participant to the revelation and a point of beginning for its continuation. From this beginning, the Jewish nation developed and persevered until the scriptural fullness of time, when the Father sent his son, Jesus, into the world to reveal the secrets of the kingdom of God to all with the ears to hear.

His work in the world consisted in the infection of the world of men by the persistent virus of the Word of the Father, culminating with his death on the cross, exemplifying the foundation of his message: that to love the life in this world is to lose it; that it can only be saved by hating it for the sake of the Father. This message is, however, so onerous to men that it was hardly received; only a very small remnant of the Jews received it. Through Jesus, the Father claimed their attention. This small group, this "Little Flock," then went out into the world sowing the seed, the Word of Truth, into the hearts of men everywhere. Thus he claimed the attention not only of Jews, but of Gentiles also.

Then a certain pattern repeated itself: there was growth as the *ekklesia* persisted and expanded throughout the world, but the expansion was accompanied by a dilution of the significance of the Word of Truth. Its major theme, the love of the Father with the accompanying hatred of life in this

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world, was submerged and replaced with a different doctrine – that salvation comes by faith in a Christ who sacrificed his flesh and blood as a sacrificial lamb. He came to be understood, in the light of the prophets, to have taken our sins upon himself, and it is this false doctrine that still prevails in Christendom.

Nevertheless, there always remains a remnant, the Little Flock, who have heard the Word of the Good Shepherd and have responded, thus proving themselves to be his sheep. I remind you how he said:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me (John 10:27).

His death on the cross also signaled the victory over Satan who had before ruled the world of men through appeal to the fear of death – a victory that consummated the rule, or Kingdom, of God on the earth. Thus all people, Gentile and Jew, churchmen and the sheep of the Little

Flock, play their parts in the divine plan that issues, at the Resurrection, in the eternal salvation of the children of God, and the final realization of his Holy Will – that he might have children to share his Glory.