

CHAPTER IX

THE IDEAL FELLOWSHIP

The Fellowship of the Little Flock aspires to an elusive goal. We are unlikely ever to achieve it in this world, but the effort should never cease. It will surely help if we know where we are going, and can image a vision of what we should be while we trust in the Love of the Father to forgive us our grave failures and to inspire us to press on. The preceding discussion forms a base for the clarification of one man's vision of how the Lord would have the sheep of the Little Flock comport themselves in fellowship during their pilgrimages through the world.

Devotion to the Word

Of first importance is an unwavering devotion to his Word, the Holy Words uttered by Jesus and recorded for us in the Gospels. These words are unique in the world in that they constitute a living body of Truth, and it is in them that Jesus is personified. In them he and the Holy Spirit and the Father continues to be with us in the world, and through our devotion to them, we continue to be with him. When, together, we truly listen to him, the darkness is dispersed and all dissension evaporates. We enter into Christ when we enter into his Word; he enters into us when we receive his Word into our minds and hearts. It is through his Word that we realize all Truth, and comprehend his presence in our midst. Judas (not Iscariot) once asked Jesus, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Then Jesus replied:

If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him (John 14:23)

Isn't that simple? If we love him we keep his Word, then he lives with us and makes his home with us – not only the Son, but also the Father! Like a tree, this True Tree of Life constantly bears fruit that nourishes and sustains the spirit of life that is in us, and we want for nothing. That is, provided we are gathered around it and under its branches, feeding daily, constantly, on its glorious fruit, the Words of Life. We need no leader other than the Word; we need no teacher other than the Word; we need no spirit other than the Holy Spirit that mediates the Word to us, for the Spirit and the Word are one. Remember what he said?

. . . the words that I have spoken to you are Spirit and life. (John 6:63)

They are indeed words of Life. They are beautiful Words; they are wonderful Words. At Jacob's well, in Samaria, Jesus told the Samaritan woman:

Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life. (John 4:13,14)

So it is that his Holy Words, like a spring of water inside us, wells up to produce Truth such that we need never thirst again.

I am focusing on the Holy Word, the utterances of Jesus, because they are the essence of our fellowship in him, and with one another. In the pure light of his Word we cannot help but be

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unified in the bonds of love. We cannot fail to see the Way when he enlightens it for us, nor can we fail to love and labor for one another. Neither can we fail in the divine calling, the proclamation of that same Word in the world. Why seek we authority, administrations, commissions and like things that characterize the churches in the world, when He has provided them all in abundance, through the ministrations of his Holy Word? Why seek we other shepherds, when we have the Good Shepherd? Why seek we teachers to confuse us about the Bible, when he is the perfect teacher of all Truth? Why seek we other fathers in the church, when we have one Holy Father, even the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? So let us hear him! So let us gather round him and drink up the water that wells up into everlasting life. You need go no further than the gospels of your New Testament for that!

A Portrait from History

The failure – the utter failure in Christendom -- of the confessors of the Name to listen to the words enunciated by Jesus of Nazareth has led to such terrible tragedy that there is no way for mere words to express the horror of our deficient heritage. A picture comes into my mind that illustrates it, a picture from the history of the church; and perhaps, if we had been there, might have sufficed to drive us in quest of Truth. But I doubt it, since it did not have that effect upon many others.

It is the morning of October 27, 1553. The setting is the road from Geneva, Switzerland, to the hill of Champel, just south of Geneva. Two men are riding in a carriage, escorted by men of arms. One of the two is William Farel, an associate of John Calvin, the famed reformer in the administration of Geneva. The other is Michael Servetus, bound and condemned to death for heresy by the Geneva Small Council, at the urging and prosecution of Calvin. His "crimes" were two-fold: Unitarianism (denial of the Trinity) and rejection of infant baptism. As they progressed on the way to the execution, Farel besought the condemned man to confess his crime and seek divine mercy. Servetus denied his guilt and besought God to pardon his accusers. Arriving at their destination, he was fastened to a stake by iron chains, all the while pleading for mercy, and burned to death. It is reported that he shrieked with agony when the flames reached his face, and died after half an hour of burning. (The Reformation, by Will Durant, Simon and Schuster, 1957, p 484).

John Calvin and William Farel, to whom the whole Bible is the literal word of God – and this was the fruit of it! It is not that Calvin was carried away with the fanaticism of a moment of religious rage. No, this was an act he had determined beforehand. As early as February 1546, he had written to Farel: "Servetus has just sent me a long volume of his ravings. If I consent he will come here but I will not give my word, for should he come, if my authority is of any avail, I will not suffer him to get out alive." (Durant, p. 481) Writing later, in defense of the murder of Servetus, he said, "God himself has explicitly instructed us to kill heretics, to smite with the sword any city that abandons the worship of the true faith revealed by Him." (Durant, p. 485) He sustained his position by appeal to the decrees of the Old Testament, from Deuteronomy, Exodus, and Leviticus. What a pity he did not listen to Jesus, who had earlier prophesied this terrible action when he said to his disciples:

The time will come when those who kill you think they do God service (John 16:2).

What a pity he did not listen to Jesus so as to hear him say:

Let both grow together, (Matthew. 13:30) and

Do not resist one who is evil (Matthew. 5:39).

And these men, John Calvin and William Farel, were very successful in founding, at Geneva, their vision of the "ideal fellowship," and were among the founders of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Europe and America. With founders like these, is it any wonder that Christendom

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has gone astray? This is a superlative example of that which results when religious men approach the Holy Faith in the conviction that the entire Bible is the literal Word of God. They become so enamored of their "Truth" that there is no room in them for the Words of Jesus, which are true and literal words of God.

Objections

Many do not share my confidence in the Words of Jesus as recorded in the Four Gospels of the New Testament, and as set before you here as the source, the power, and the inspiration of the "ideal fellowship" of disciples. Among them are those who object on the basis of language. This is an honest and reasonable objection, and I quite understand it, having entertained it myself some long years past. It is argued that Jesus enunciated his words in the Aramaic language of First Century Palestine. There is no record that they were ever written in their original language, and the evidence indicates that they must have been preserved only in an oral tradition drawn from the memories of the first disciples. Not until some thirty-five years later when Mark's Gospel was written do we see them recorded, and our oldest copies of the recordings are in ancient koine Greek, not in Aramaic, and these are copies of the originals. The earliest copies date from about the third century. There are numerous ancient copies, and many of them differ, and they are not uniform. To understand how easily errors can creep in, we need only note that all the ancient manuscripts were laboriously copied by hand, by men with the same propensities to make mistakes as we yet possess.

Then, today, most of us learn of his Word by exposure to English versions heavily influenced by that of King James, which was translated not from the Greek, but from a Latin translation of the Greek manuscripts. So how can we possibly place any confidence in text that has passed through so extensive a gauntlet of abuse by frail humans intent on making it relevant to their needs? First in Aramaic, then through perhaps a generation of verbal transmission before being recorded in Aramaic, and later translated into Greek, or perhaps directly translated into Greek from the oral tradition and recorded. Then after hundreds of years, translated again from non-uniform copies of copies of copies, etc., into Latin, then more generations into English and other languages! What assurance can we have, after two thousand years, that the language of the Four Gospels represents in any way the very words of Jesus? And besides all this, there are many other gospels and written records concerning Jesus and his utterances in additions to the four, and when we look at them, we find contradictions, additions, omissions, and radical deviations from the language of the New Testament, in addition to much uniformity.

English, Latin, or Greek words cannot of course be the very words of Jesus if those were Aramaic. But it is not in that sense that I speak of his very words. The Greek *logos*, translated into English as "word," also means "idea." What are words, anyway, except the expression of ideas? So when I speak of "the very words of Jesus" I mean "the very ideas of Jesus" in whatever language, because the idea is what is essential. The form of the word they may take is immaterial. I also mean to distinguish the utterances of the man, Jesus, from the balance of the Bible, which, though written by inspired men, is not the infallible Word of God on par with the utterances of Jesus.

Assurance of the Word

So the ultimate question is, "What assurance do we have that the words we have in the oldest Greek manuscripts, and hence in English translations that are as exact as possible, represent the very ideas of Jesus?" We have much assurance, and I enumerate some of it here.

- (1) Jesus provided for the protection of his Word through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. I have related above how the ministry of the Holy Spirit was to focus on the Word so as to assure that it would be accurately reported in the world. Jesus stated that the Holy Spirit was to come and teach the first disciples all things, bringing to their remembrance all that

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he had said to them. Therefore, the accuracy of the message was not to depend wholly on the recollections of fallible men, but was entrusted to the protection of the Holy Spirit. We should acknowledge also that Jesus must certainly have repeated his message to his disciples many times, until it was drilled into their memories, as was the custom of teachers of that age. We should conclude from this that the ministry of the Eternal Spirit did not terminate with the inspiration of the first disciples, but that it has continued unceasing to the present, so that the Word has been protected throughout the centuries as it has been transcribed and translated from one language to another. The switch from one language of men to another would be no problem to the Holy Spirit, who made his capabilities in this field known on the Day of Pentecost, when men from many nations heard the disciples, inspired by the Spirit, speaking in their various languages (Acts 2:5-13). The disciples were all Galileans, apparently speaking in their native Aramaic, yet men from many nations understood them in their native tongue.

- (2) Jesus assured us of the perpetuation of his Word, until heaven and earth pass away. I have repeatedly emphasized his prophecy that his Word, unlike heaven and earth, would not pass away. The very fact that it remains before us to this day is therefore great assurance that Jesus knew whereof he spoke. The Holy Spirit continues to protect it with the result that it continues to be preserved. We have assurance that it will stand long after heaven and earth have fallen. It is quite impressive to read the words of ancient philosophers, and there are a few whose words have lasted to this day. But did the philosophers announce to their contemporaries that their words were to survive heaven and earth, as did Jesus? Among all so-called philosophers, I think Jesus knew and announced assuredly that his Word would stand forever. It still stands. This alone is very impressive.
- (3) We depend upon not one gospel, but four. So Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, provided a plurality of witnesses and they tell substantially the same story. There are many differences, especially between the fourth Gospel and the synoptics, yet they are not contradictions, but rather augment, complete, and reinforce one another. The fact that they are not uniform is in itself a source of assurance; it tells us that we are not the victims of a literary scam according to which someone copied uniform versions of an early text, or later modified them to insure conformity. The differences are precisely those one should expect from earnest men laboring independently but under the impress of the Holy Spirit to accurately record, transmit, and translate the very words of Jesus.

The Fourth Gospel may seem a problem to some because it differs greatly from the others, not only in the text, but in the literary flavor of the entire book. It includes very many sayings completely omitted by the others, and omits most of their content. The sequences of events differ so much that clearly there was no effort at coordination. There is no nativity story in the Fourth Gospel; there is no wedding at Cana in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Indeed, the author of the Fourth Gospel seems not to have been much concerned with the telling of a sequential story, but rather with recording many utterances of Jesus, each set in an appropriate place in his earthly sojourn. Yet after all this is acknowledged, we must state that the message is thoroughly consistent with that of the other Gospels. We must also acknowledge that neither does the order of major events differ in John. The Baptist, for example, appears at the beginning, the Crucifixion at the end of the story. The order of the Holy Week events is exactly the same in all four gospels. The textual differences are vividly illustrated by reference to the hatred-of-life sayings. In the Fourth Gospel and at one point in Luke, hatred is precisely the focus:

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

If anyone comes to me and does not hate . . . even his own life, he cannot be my

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disciple (Luke 14:26).

But in Matthew and Mark, and elsewhere in Luke, the focus is on saving, finding, or losing:

He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:39)

For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. (Mark 8:35).

For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake, he will save it (Luke 9:224).

Yet all the utterances are perfectly consistent, each augmenting, enforcing, and expanding the others. The major differences, I believe, are easily explained when we pause to acknowledge that the Fourth Gospel was probably written last, perhaps thirty years after the others, sometime around the turn of the First Century. Let us assume at this point that the writer was not John, but the beloved disciple (whom I identify as Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead), who would have been maybe ninety years old (but probably not much more than seventy). He would almost certainly have read Matthew, Mark, Luke and the non-canonical gospels that had been written by that time. No doubt, as one of the last survivors of the original small group of disciples that included the apostles, many documents were submitted to him for his evaluation and judgment as to authenticity. Like many older people, he may not have been able to recall what happened "yesterday," yet could have recalled those amazing words and unforgettable events of his youth with great clarity. Let us not forget also that the Holy Spirit was there prompting his memory, as Jesus had promised. Then, having read the others, he would have realized that there were many important statements by Jesus, and events in his life, that the others had not, for whatever reason, included. He would not have been concerned with chronology or with event sequence, but only with providing a record of many important things that had been omitted.

I propose therefore that he was not concerned with setting down an orderly account of the life of Jesus, but only with providing what he observed to be lacking in the accounts already written. Therefore he would not have included what the others had already set forth so satisfactorily, but only what they had not set forth, with a minimum of repetition to provide some degree of correspondence. His great age and long experience with the Lord in the company of the Holy Spirit, together with the fact that he had once died and been resurrected by Jesus, could also explain why the tenor of his writing differs somewhat from the others. He also may have been influenced by decades of combating the numerous heresies that were budding in the late First Century, and if so, would have written his Gospel with a view to combating them. This would also have influenced the quality of the writing. Therefore I see that the delayed writing of the Fourth Gospel, together with the extended experience of the beloved disciple and his own resurrection, explains its distinctive content and quality. In this case, we have the further assurance that the total record is substantially complete; the aged disciple would have been careful to check that everything of importance was at last included.

Much of this is, of course, speculation on my part; yet I believe it is entirely consistent with the scarcity of known facts, and, given the consistency of all four of the canonical gospels, is much more probable than any explanation that seeks to focus on supposed contradictions or alterations of the story of Jesus, or that seek to demonstrate a fictional quality to the writings. Rather, we have on these grounds a firm basis for assurance that the integrity of his words and has been maintained with great accuracy.

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I have mentioned that there were many other records of the words and deeds of Jesus in addition to the four canonical gospels. Having read many of them, I feel that they were justifiably excluded from the canon. This does not mean that there is no benefit to be gained from their study, for there is much in them that parallels or reinforces themes of the canonical gospels. To give some examples, in The Apocryphon of James, we have the following utterance of Jesus, which is perfectly consistent with his teaching of the hatred of life, and gives additional insight:

I say to you, none of those who are afraid of death will be saved. For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who have put themselves to death. (4:15-20)

The Gospel of the Ebionites has Jesus saying:

I have come to do away with sacrifices, and if ye cease not from sacrificing, the wrath of God will not cease from you (Saying 6).

This statement strongly reinforces the conclusions drawn from reading Jesus' statements regarding sacrifices as set forth in the canon. But there are also contradictions between the canonical and the extra canonical gospels, so that we must be careful how we apply them.

(4) The utterances of Jesus in the four canonical gospels do not contain errors of scientific naiveté, as do some of the others. For example, in The Dialogue of the Savior, we read:

He said to them, "He who sustains the earth is he who sustains the heaven. When a word comes forth from the Greatness, it will go to him who sustains the heavens and the earth. For the earth does not move; if it moved, it would fall, but (it does not fall) in order that the first word might not be annulled, namely, he is the one who established the world, and he dwelt in it, and he received incense from it." For everything that does not move I will bring to you, all ye sons of men, for you are from that place (133:1-15).

Whoever first said or wrote this (it certainly wasn't Jesus) had a view of the world in the same genre with that of the lady who held to the ancient belief that the world was supported on the back of a turtle. When challenged by the question, "On what, then, does the turtle rest?" she responded, "Don't mess with me, Buster. Its turtles all the way down!" The utterances of Jesus from the four gospels contain no such foolishness. They are, to the contrary, perfectly consistent with the functioning of the natural world as we are only now, two thousand years later, beginning to comprehend it through the discoveries of the scientists. This is indeed remarkable, and gives us ample grounds for confidence in the four gospels, even by itself. Thus, we have assurance that the words uttered by Jesus and recorded in the canon were uttered by one who was, and is, knowledgeable concerning the operation of the physical universe. Would we not expect the creator to know how it functions?

The churchmen, on the other hand, for hundreds of years, in deafness to the Savior, continued to believe the earth motionless. Witness the accusations made against Galileo, in the Seventeenth Century, who had begun to teach that the earth revolved around the Sun, not vice versa as the churchmen taught. When arrested, charged with heresy and hailed before the authorities, he is said to have recanted (of the doctrine that the earth moves), but nevertheless said to himself, under his breath, "But it does move!" So, when you stop to think about it, you have to marvel that there was a man, two thousand years ago, who gave extensive teachings over a period of years, teachings that were later recorded for us, which nevertheless contain no evidence of ignorance on the part of the speaker concerning the nature of the physical universe, which we are only

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now beginning to fathom.

(5) The message the words convey, in English or any other language, is most peculiar. It is such a message as no perfidious man, nor any sincerely mistaken disciple, could have conceived or transmitted. It violates all that men by nature honor, by calling for a commitment to the hatred of life, and by making our eternal salvation directly dependent on this. The character of the message is such that it would never have been invented by any of us, conditioned as we are by evolutionary forces to put the preservation and protection, yea, the love of life foremost in everything. I have been a student of theology for fifty years. Through all those years of study, through seminary, through church, through the reading of scores of volumes on theology, I cannot recall ever having been exposed through any of it to this idea of Jesus. Indeed, so inundated was I by exposure to works of scholarship that it is a wonder that I was ever able to hear Jesus' simple message. When finally I began to hear him, it was so contrary to what I had been taught that I required many more years of exposure to the pure Word of Jesus before rejoicing in the light. May the Father forgive me for being such a sluggard!

(6) Furthermore, to suppose that such a message as that of Jesus with its consistency and singular nature, as we now have it in the four gospels, could have resulted from centuries of transcription and translation errors is so improbable as to be ridiculous.

(7) Neither is it reasonable to suppose that this message, consistent throughout the gospels, could have been built up progressively by "myth makers" who were motivated to create an image of Jesus and his teachings that was relevant to their particular circumstances, as certain "scholars" are inclined to do. I understand this scholarly approach. I appreciate some of the fruits of it. I can also see that it has arisen through the failure of the scholars to realize the unitary theme of the love of God/hatred of life correlate that joins the gospels in a consistent whole to the person of the historical Jesus. Neither have I found, in their published works, any evidence that they have even attempted such a unification of the gospel messages with the person of Jesus. Since they have not perceived this emphasis in all the gospels, it is not surprising to find them wandering through The Lost Gospel of Q and other contrived documents in an effort to explain the origins of the gospel's presentation of Jesus.

(8) The message is profound -- yes, profoundly simple, clear and consistent. It is not such a message as would result from centuries of adulteration through faulty translation, transmission and myth making. When we look at it, we can know what it says, without a doubt. There is no confused rendering of linguistic error. It presents a simple, consistent, and profound view of life. I have an acquaintance, an author, who objected to my confidence in "the very words of Jesus" based upon his particular experience in this field. He was once president of a corporation that had been sold to French interests. He sent them an acquisition proposal that he had written in English. They then sent the proposal to their "first rate" translation department for translation into French and then decided not to make the acquisition, and so informed him, but he, thinking to make the acquisition himself, sent them a request for the return of his original proposal. They had lost it; but seeking to accommodate him, they sent their French version back to the translation department for translation back into English and provided that. "When I read it," he said, "I didn't have the foggiest idea what the paper said."

This is precisely what we should expect to happen to text that has passed through many sequences of translation and transcription. But with the very words of Jesus this is not the case. There is no fogginess there. No! Rather, every statement is clear, even brutally clear, sharp, concise and consistent. This is powerful testimony to the authenticity of the ideas -- the very ideas, and hence the very words, of Jesus as we have

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received them. This is most assuring of the authenticity of his words. That they have passed through twenty centuries of verbal and written transmission, transcription, and translation, and yet remain clear as a bell is miraculous. Only the Holy Spirit could have accomplished it! It is a miracle! But those of us who truly believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus should not be surprised; If God could resurrect his body, can he not also resurrect his words? Indeed, his words are his body.

(9) The message accurately prophesies the salient features of the history of Christendom, though written at the beginning of that history. The continuing paucity of genuine faith is accurately reflected in his plaintive question, Yet shall the Son of Man find faith on the earth when he comes? The persecution of the few, and the apostasy of the many, conforms with his prophetic statement, Those who kill you will think they do God service. (John 16:2) The execution of Michael Servetus by John Calvin's Geneva, to which I have referred above, is a sterling example of the latter. Jesus accurately described the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple some forty years beforehand. Of course, I am aware that many have placed the dating of the gospels after the fall of Jerusalem, precisely because they are unwilling to concede that Jesus could have foreseen the event so clearly. If this is true, we are left to conclude that the writers fudged Jesus' prophecies after the fact. Considering all the reasons I have already given for confidence in our record of Jesus' words and ideas, there is no reasonable basis for this conclusion, either. Those writers were such men as were readily laying down their lives for the Gospel. They were committed to the ideas of Jesus, including the hatred of life. It is totally unreasonable of us to suppose that they would have been the least dishonest in recording their recollections of the utterances of the Lord. They were guarding the message with their very lives -- why would they foul it up with lies?

Besides all this we have a certain fact to deal with. When Jesus prophesied the fall of Jerusalem, he was careful to forewarn the disciples to flee beforehand. I believe this was to preserve their testimony to the Word in the world, for Jesus was depending on them, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to sow it around the globe. Here is the utterance.

So, when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet, Daniel, standing in the holy place, let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house; and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle. And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened (Matthew 24:15-22).

This "desolating sacrilege" is the presence of Gentiles in the Holy of Holies within the temple. It was fulfilled when the Romans destroyed the city and everything in it. This is the same event Jesus also prophesied in Luke:

And when he drew near and saw the city he wept over it, saying, Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But now they are hid from your eyes. For the days shall come upon you, when your enemies will cast up a bank about you and surround you and hem you in on every side, and dash you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave on stone upon another in you; because you did not know the time of your visitation. (Luke 19:41-44)

So what actually happened? When the Romans under Titus advanced on the city, the loyal Jews retreated within its walls -- not just because it was a good defensive position,

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but also thinking that God would surely not permit the Romans to enter. So they went into the city, and to their doom. There was one exception: those Jews who were also disciples of Jesus, having heard his Word, fled precisely as he had instructed them. The historical record indicates not only that they fled the Romans, but also that they took up new residence in the city of Pella, in Perea, as I have earlier indicated (Eusebius). Yet the people who fled to Pella were also loyal Jews; they also had early in life been instilled with confidence that Jerusalem would stand forever as the city of the people of God. They had continued to visit the temple and to revere the Holy of Holies. But they fled, and their relatives branded them as traitors. This strange flight can best be understood by accepting that the prophecies of Jesus, including the entire context containing the instruction to flee, was authentic in every detail, and that they were but following the instructions of their Lord.

Therefore I conclude, for these reasons and many others, that the words of Jesus as we have them are substantially accurate and complete. They have not been confused through translation, or transcription, or telling and retelling. Given all the circumstances and facts, this is the only sensible, reasonable, logical conclusion. When we dare to expose ourselves to them, that is, to his very words, the Truth in its immaculate purity stands before us and we cannot reasonably deny it. I have invested several pages on this theme because it is this Holy Word that is the heart of the "ideal fellowship" that I envision and pursue with all my heart. They constitute the living body of Jesus in our midst; they are the power and the glory of the Holy Spirit standing before us, and by our devotion to him we secure the fellowship of the Little Flock. Apart from him, apart from his living Word, there is no Little Flock.

It is not possible to realize the fellowship of the Little Flock while holding to the traditional concepts of the church. There can be no bevy of priests, pastors, shepherds, bishops, overseers, leaders, and teachers. There is only one of all these, and that one is all of them! There can be no unity of the flock, no bonding administrative structures, no chains of command from one human being to another, no infallible "ex cathedra" proclamations to guide and inspire us, but only the precious presence of the Lord through the indwelling Holy Word of the Father, as uttered by Jesus. All of this, absolutely all of it, if it is to be realized in experience, must come from placing him at the absolute center and excluding all else. But when we place his Living Word at the center, when we look only to him for guidance, and when we do it together, there is the fellowship of the Little Flock. What is the option? Look around you. Look out at the vast multiplicity of organizations and personality cults that go by the name of church and you see it, loud and clear.