

Christ's Kirk

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[0 : 00] If we turn to Acts 20 and verse 28, we find that the Apostle Paul told the elders of the Deficit to feed the church involved.

And behind the word church here there is the Greek word ecclesia, which in English words ecclesiastic and so on are derived.

Now the word ecclesia, the Greek word for church, itself comes from the two Greek words, the word ek and the word kaleo, which together would mean to call out.

And I make the point because sometimes people build a whole theory of the church on this word and on this derivation.

And they describe the church of God as God's called out ones. Now the truth is that the word ecclesia comes from those two Greek words.

[1 : 09] There is no doubt that the derivation had been long since forgotten, long before the New Testament period. And the word ecclesia by this time simply meant an assembly.

It was applied, for example, to the great city-states of Greece, such as Athens. When the whole city assembled to make decisions politically, then the assembled city, the whole populace, was called the ecclesia.

And the basic meaning of the word church is in fact simply assembly. Christian brethren very often refer to the church as simply as the assembly.

And at this level the word church simply represents the gathered people of God, God's people coming together. And most of the other words which the Bible uses to denote the church point us in the same direction.

The word congregation, for example, the Old Testament church was called the congregation of the Lord, the Kahal Yahweh.

[2 : 26] We have again the phrase, the tent of meeting. And we have also, of course, a familiar New Testament Jewish word for a synagogue, which means exactly the same thing.

God's people gather together. So all the terms that we use here, the term ecclesia, the term congregation, the term synagogue, all of those terms point us in the same direction that the church represents simply, God's people gather together.

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[4 : 34] evangelism, etc. God's people gather together, who have a strong title of the United States. He also gather together in the same context as the team, the term gospel. By of words, God's people ange rather than a group. God's people live together as the auxiliary il back into presence, so it is omnipotential of our church's family.

With dumbo and peek atopity so Boys to the church with a priest that the church doesn't run. be there as a priestbig! corporately, recall in Philippians chapter 2 that well-known Pauline directive to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Now instinctively we apply that directive to our own individual salvation. But it is virtually certain from the context that Paul was thinking not of individuals at Philippi but of the corporate well-being of God's congregation at Philippi.

Remember the problem was that in the church at Philippi things were being done through strife and vain glory. There was envy and jealousy and so on. And Paul's conclusion of his whole discussion of that issue in Philippians 2 is to work out your own salvation. There are many ways that reminds us of the importance of attending not simply to our own individual spiritual prosperity but also to the well-being of the churches and congregations of which we are a part. So I'm saying that the church

represents the gathering together of God's people. And the responsibility falls upon us to give attention not only to our own individual spiritual well-being but to the well-being of the congregations to which we belong. Well having said that there are three major questions to ask. There is a question first of all of the marks of the church, the question secondly of the government of the church and the question thirdly of the unity of the church.

But I want to explore those three questions fairly rapidly. First of all the question what are the marks of the church?

what are the notes of the true church of God? Now the reformation threw this question into high relief.

[7 : 23] Because the reformers had left the church of Rome and the church of Rome claimed that it was the one and only holy catholic church.

At the same time numerous sects arose claiming to be themselves pure expressions of the idea of the church of God in the new testament.

And so both over against Rome and against the sects the reformers especially Luther had to ask how do we know the true church of God?

What are the marks of the church of God? Now there is interesting development with regard to this issue. We find that Calvin indicated two great notes of the church. The preaching of the word and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper being duly administered.

We find that in Scotland there was added to that a third mark, the mark of discipline.

[8 : 32] And by and large if we ask most folk who have thought on this issue, informed theology, they tell us that the church of God has three marks.

The preaching of the word, the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of church discipline. Now it seems to me that Larking in the less familiar areas of reformed theology there was also an emphasis not often detected on two other indispensable marks of the church of God.

In the Scottish tradition from John Knox in the book of discipline there was a very clear stress on what Knox called distributions.

But what has since come to be known more widely as the ministry of compassion. And in the Westminster standards there is also a very clear emphasis on a fifth mark, namely that the church is known by the fact that it worships.

Now the next result of this is that the synthesis that I would propose from those studies is that the church of God bears five great marks.

[10 : 04] And I want to go through them quickly. First of all the preaching of the word. First of all the preaching of the word. Now it isn't simply you see that a true church has an orthodox creed.

That obviously is true. But a true church is known by its possession of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith.

Now the second Vatican council gave great prominence to the idea of a hierarchy of truths. That some doctrines were more important than others.

But in fact that really is an old Protestant distinction going back at least as far as John Calvin. And very prominent for example in such free church theologians as the great William Cunningham.

Now there are indeed fundamental doctrines and there are secondary doctrines. For example the doctrine of Christ's deity is fundamental. The doctrine of the millennium is not fundamental.

[11 : 14] And the true church was known by its possession, its possession by conviction of the great and fundamental doctrines.

And those doctrines were often set forth in various creeds and confessions of the reformation in which the church has expressed their own systems of belief.

But the reformers you see stressed, it is not the mere possession of truth that attests a living church. It is the proclamation of the truth.

Does the church preach the gospel? Does the church preach the gospel? Because it is quite possible that a body of people might be very orthodox in their convictions and yet make no effort to proclaim those convictions and in that sense to evangelize the world.

And in fact this familiar emphasis that the church is known by the preaching of the word might be redefined as that the church of God by definition is evangelistic.

[12 : 31] If it is not evangelistic, if there is no interest in Christian outreach, if it is not committed to a Christian mission, to bringing God's good news to every man, then it lacks an essential mark of

the church of God.

Now that is a very solemn thing. Because we are, as I put it to you, very, very inclined to imagine that so long as the creed is orthodox and authentic, then we measure up to this great mark. Now in my view we don't. We measure up to it only if we proclaim that message. Only if we preach the Christian gospel.

So that's the first mark. A church is known by the fact that it proclaims the truth. And that means that no believer ought to attach himself to a church in which the great doctrines are not held and the gospel is not preached.

Now sometimes there is a heresy of silence as well as a heresy of proclamation. In the age of the moderates in Scotland, for example, you would seldom hear a heresy in the pulpit.

[13:53] But you might go many a mile without ever hearing the truth actually preached. And it is quite possible for some churches which have orthodox creeds to give no due emphasis to some of the doctrines such as, for example, justification by faith alone.

So I'm saying we never attach ourselves to a church which does not proclaim the great fundamental doctrines. The second mark of the church was the administration of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

Now this means, of course, that a body which does not administer those sacraments is not a church. There are several Christian bodies, interdenominational bodies, which engage in various activities, both evangelistic and social, but they do not administer the sacraments.

Now it is God's will for us that we should express our faith in baptism and nourish and sustain our faith by coming to the Lord's table.

Now the reformers gave great attention to the question of the due administration of the sacraments. It doesn't seem to me that there is very much merit at this point in going into that particular issue in detail.

[15:32] The issue obviously here was the Mass which had perverted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and had turned it into a repetition of the actual sacrifice of Christ on Calvary.

And it had also reverted it by advocating the view that in the Mass the body and blood of Jesus was literally converted, was the precipitant of the priest's words, this is my body.

If I turn it into a more active sense, they said that when the priest said this is my body, the bread was converted into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ.

Now this was expressed in the most literal terms. It was argued that every crumb of that bread was the body and the soul and the divinity of Jesus.

And following on from that quite logically, there was what is called the adoration of the host. Now to some Protestants this is rather mysterious terminology because the English word host has its own meaning.

[16:55] And I suppose that when we hear of the adoration of the host, most of us mention that somebody is adoring the priest who is the host at the Lord's Supper.

Now the priest of course in Roman thought, I'm afraid, is seen as the one who presides in Christ's name at the Lord's Supper.

But the host in the Lord in the Mass is not the priest, the host is the Latin word *hostia* for a sacrifice. And the adoration of the host or the *hostia* is in fact the worship of the bread.

The worship of the bread which has ceased to be bread because the bread is now the body, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. Now it was this that led the reformers to argue, in my view, wholly justifiably, that the Mass was a blasphemy.

It was a blasphemy because it led to the literal worship of what was only bread. Now today I think we must look at this position a little more cautiously because there is no doubt that the Church of Rome itself is today highly embarrassed by its own traditional doctrine on this particular subject.

[18:20] And it does the best it can to disavow literal transubstantiation and also literal representation of the sacrifice of Christ in the Mass.

But it still remains that the official dogma of the Church of Rome expressed in the decrees of Trent, for example, and in the Tridentine Catechism is one that sets forth this doctrine which was so abhorrent to the reformers.

Now it was against that background that mainly Calvin spoke of the sacraments duly administered. That is, stripped of all those non-biblical accretions and enacted in their biblical simplicity.

Now it is a moot point whether in fact Calvin ever loosed himself from Rome's superstition on this particular issue.

And certainly Luther never did so. And there is still, I think, a good deal of superstition accruing to this subject even in old circles, but I leave that to a future occasion.

[19 : 42] The second mark of the Church was the sacraments administered in the biblical way. Now the one thing I will add to that is this, that the reformers really wanted the sacraments administered very, very frequently.

Certainly it was Calvin's conviction that once a week was by no means too often. And he had to settle for a monthly administration, but that was an accommodation to a situation, not an expression of his convictions.

And it is, I think, a pity that we have lost sight of what I would almost call the centrality of the sacraments. I say that because in a way it is overstatement.

But we have made them so peripheral that we need an enormous effort to reinstate them in their due biblical position. So we move on to the third mark of the Church, which was the exercise of discipline.

Now, it is true that this meant at some levels that every true Church of Christ was characterized by the exercise of proper control over admission to membership and over the behavior and over the behavior and conduct of members of the Church.

[21 : 15] And there was due provision made for dealing with those who offended and who violated the norms of Christian conduct. And that meant that there emerged at the Reformation a very coherent attitude towards what were called Church censures, such as excommunication and so on.

But it would be a great pity, I suggest, to equate discipline with Church censures. As in so many other instances, I think we suffer from the misfortune here that we are using an English word which has a current connotation, which differs from its original Latin meaning.

And in the original Latin meaning of discipline and disciplina, discipline in fact involved much more than Church censures. For example, both John Knox and Andrew Melville prepared what were called the Books of Discipline, the first book and the second book of Discipline.

Now these are not books about Church censures. They are books about the structures and the organization of the Church. It's a very interesting fact that mainly the Apostle Paul and mainly John Calvin, mainly John Knox, who were men of prophetic passion, were also so deeply committed to organization.

They were all fantastic organizers. And it was from that concern to have an organized Church that there emerged those two great books of discipline in our Scottish tradition.

[23 : 03] Now what is meant, of course, by this mark is that the Church of God must have proper biblical organization. Now I'll postpone for the moment the discussion of the details involved here.

But in the Church of God things had to be done decently and in order. And there were certain functionaries and certain officers to be appointed and certain arrangements to be made to facilitate the life and mission of the Church.

And the mark therefore became that the Church was known by the fact that it had a biblically derived and biblically controlled organization.

Now that may seem to us fairly remote, but to bring it down to the present day, you see, you face the immediate difficulty. Suppose we believe, as I suppose most of us here do, that God in his word forbids women either to be elders or to be preachers of the word in the Church of God.

Where does that leave a church which has abandoned God's discipline in that area and in contravention of what I for the moment call simply an apparent biblical norm, that ordains women to both of these offices.

[24 : 32] So that is the kind of question involved here. Is a church which has bishops? Is a church which does not have elders? Is a church which has women elders? Is that a true Church of God?

That is the kind of issue involved in this question of discipline as a mark of the Church. And then fourthly, there was the mark of worship.

The Church of God is known by the fact that it not simply holds the Gospel, but in response to that Gospel, it means to use Paul's language in 1 Corinthians, it means to call on the name of the Lord. It calls on the name of the Lord. It worships Jesus.

It doesn't simply hold certain convictions with regard to Jesus, but it gathers to worship Jesus. Now I referred before in this course of lectures to the earliest known pagan reference to the Church of

God, the Roman historian Pliny, who tells us that there was a sect which he knew of, and they met on the first day of the week to sing hymns to Christ as to a God, to one Christ as a God. Now that means that the Church of God is really what I shall call in the jargon for the moment, it is a doxological community. It comes together for doxology. It comes together to sing hymns to Christ as to a God.

[26 : 13] Now there is a difficulty here, which I am just going to leave with you, and it is this, that in fact the New Testament never uses the language of worship for the public gatherings of the Church.

The worry that the Church of God meant to break bread, and the Church of God meant to be taught, and so on. But it is an interesting fact that the specific vocabulary of the words of worship are not used for the Church's public gatherings.

We do however know from 1 Corinthians 12 to 14 that the Church of God meant to sing psalms and to engage in prayer.

We know from Acts chapter 2 that they rejoiced and they meant to praise God from house to house. So a good deal of praising went on. Now it is an important point again, you see, because there is a great danger with us, that because of an emphasis on the primacy of preaching, that the liturgical can get squeezed out of our Church gatherings.

And I myself find it difficult to be patient when those conducting services, for example, reduce the number of verses that they ask the congregation to sing.

[27 : 36] Now it seems to me that we ought to, within reason, maximize participation and maximize especially the element of praise in the gatherings of the people of God.

To enable them to express their joy, their Eucharist, their thanksgiving to God. We meet to worship God, to sing hymns to Christ as to a God.

The Church is a doxological community. It comes together to engage in doxology, to say at last, glory to God, glory to Jesus Christ, glory to the Holy Spirit.

That is what worship is about. And the fifth mark I indicated was what John Knox called distributions. Now it really seems to me important that we should give due consideration to this. I left it to the last, not because I believe that it is intrinsically the most important of all the notes of the Church of God, but because it is the one most neglected in definitions of the Church in reformed circles.

[28 : 52] Now as I said, John Knox in the Book of Discipline made specific provision for the Church having a ministry to the poor.

And hence the word distributions. There was to be a collection and it would be distributed by the Church to those who are in need.

Now of course this provision was simply a reflection of what was a hallmark of the Church of God from the very, very beginning. We know from Acts chapter 6, for example, that the very earliest Church had to organise permission for the poor.

We know from Acts chapter 2 that the early post-Pentecost Christians had to make specific arrangements to ensure that the poor among them were properly provided for.

We know that when Paul went to discuss this Gospel to the Gentiles with the Apostles of Jerusalem, they said to him that your Gospel is okay, they said, but remember the poor.

[30 : 06] Which thing he says, I was also eager to do. And we see that the Apostle Paul himself, and how remarkable it is, you see, this Apostle giving time and energy to organise collections to relieve the poverty of the saints in Jerusalem.

Now what I'm saying is this, that just as a Church is not a Church if it doesn't evangelise, so a Church isn't a Church if it has no concern for the poor.

That's why we may be relieved that the Free Church at the moment has a disaster fund, which is at least some measure of public acknowledgement that we have a responsibility towards the poor.

But it would, I think, be important for every single congregation to have something of this kind. And indeed, until recently, most Free Churches would have had some kind of benevolent fund, out of which they would disperse funds to provide for folk in special need.

Now, it is not simply a matter of tokenism. There is enormous need in the world around us. There is maybe need among our own people. I'm not going to formulate how we implement this principle.

[31 : 31] I'm simply laying it down that the poor must be on our consciences. And the Church ought to be organised, not only to preach the Gospel and to evangelise, not only to worship, not only to administer sacraments.

The Church, every local Church, ought to be organised so as to be in a position to help those who are in need. Now, I know that in the welfare state that is complicated, and I suspect that the fact of such a welfare state existing at all is often an excuse for our doing nothing in this particular area. But the theology of it is crystal clear. The emphasis of liberation theology, that God has a preferential option for the poor, that emphasis is absolutely correct.

And it is not to our credit that we have lost this great Pauline and Noxian preoccupation with the Church's responsibility towards the poor.

And that responsibility is not simply to evangelise the poor. It is a responsibility to meet the material needs of the poor.

[32 : 53] So there are five marks. Now I hope that you will, for the rest of your lives, remember what those five marks of the Church are. And I say that because in the providence of God, virtually all of us, and the young folk especially, will be to some extent mobile.

And we will have to select places of worship. And there may be no easy formula. We may find that, for example, our own given denomination, it doesn't exist in a certain part of the world.

How then do we decide what church to attend? What congregation to attach ourselves to? And I say that we apply these criteria. Is the Gospel preached?

Are the sacraments surely administered? Is this Church biblically organised? Does this Church have real praise? Does this Church have any concern for the poor?

Now, without going into detail or into parenthesis on this, our Confession of Faith has a very interesting point of view here, that particular churches are more or less pure as they conform or measure up to those marks of the Church.

[34 : 12] Now, the Confession says that there is no such thing, and it acknowledges that, that there is no such thing under heaven as a pure and a perfect Church. But the degree of purity of particular churches is indicated by the degree of conformity they show to those four marks, these five marks.

Now, let me say at once that, judged by these criteria, none of a few churches is perfect. There is a difference between a true Church and a pure Church.

We are true churches if we possess these five marks in embryo. We are pure churches in proportion as we measure up to those marks more or less fully.

But I press on to my second question, which is this. What about the government of the Church?

Now, I am taking this up again, not so much because of its intrinsic importance, but because it is the issue, I suppose, which has been most discussed in Scottish theology.

We are distinguished ourselves by our attention to this particular question of Church government. And maybe I can best access it by introducing you briefly to the three main forms of Church government.

[35 : 38] First of all, there is Episcopalian government. That is government by monarchical bishops. By bishops who are deemed to be a superior class to elders, who are deemed to be overseers and superintendents of elders, and to have some kind of territorial sovereignty, they are bishops of a given geographical area, sometimes of a very large extent.

Now, of course, in essence, this position is found in Catholicism, and it is found also in Anglicanism, and it is found in various mixtures in some of the Reformed churches of Eastern Europe, which, although Calvinistic in derivation, actually happened to have bishops.

Now, of course, this was anathema to Scottish ecclesiastics from Andrew Melville downwards.

And they attacked, often without any great concern to show very much restraint, this monster of Anglican episcopacy.

Now, today, of course, we have to say the same thing in more moderate and more courteous tones, and that may not be a bad thing. But it is one of the curiosities of the current situation that ecumenical discussion, however uncertain it may be on matters of fundamental doctrine, is always absolutely assured that any resultant church or conglomerate will have to be episcopal.

[37 : 29] I say that is remarkable because there is virtually unanimity among scholars of all shades of opinion, Presbyterian, Anglican, and even Roman Catholic, that we do not find bishops in the New Testament in this monarchical sense.

The single most important monograph in the English language on the meaning of the word episcopus, from which episcopos he comes, is by the great Anglican bishop J.B. Lightfoot of Durham.

And Durham, a superb indeed and incomparable New Testament scholar, showed beyond the possibility of challenge that in the New Testament bishops and elders were equal and very synonymous.

And the Anglican commitment to episcopacy is based on tradition, not based on the New Testament. It so happens that in the second century monarchical episcopacy, bishops who were bosses, did emerge.

And it can be argued that bishops in that sense are a very great antiquity. And if antiquity is your norm, then you must have bishops. But if the New Testament is your norm, then you can't impose bishops on the church, because the New Testament had no bishops in this particular sense.

[38 : 58] That doesn't mean that we Presbyterians had no bishops. Because there were two things to be said there. Our elders were all bishops.

That's why a certain free churchman who was once in London was asked by a pompous Anglican, and I want to say there are certainly lots of non-pompous Anglicans, let me say that at once.

He was asked that a huge church had bishops. And he said, very perceptibly, yes, he said thousands of them. So that is the correct answer to that question. Now, we also have something much more subtle than that.

We have the episcopacy of presbytery. In other words, presbyteries have the functions of bishops. Presbyteries, for example, can direct Mr. Mackay to leave this congregation and set up some outreach in some remote part of the presbytery.

It can direct, as a bishop can direct. And that is built into a canon law. Now, presbyteries, as it happens today, seldom exercise those episcopal functions.

[40 : 13] And that, in my view, is sometimes a pity. But we certainly, as presbyteries, have that particular power to forbid a man to leave a charge and to require a man to leave a charge and to give various other directions of an episcopal kind.

So, episcopacy, that is, government by bishops deemed to be the superiors of elders, that is one and one widely prevalent form of church government.

Secondly, there is what is called independency or congregationalism. And this means, really, that each local congregation is seen as an autonomous unit, independent of all other units.

And these independent churches are governed by the local office bearers. Now, this, at the moment, is undergoing some modification because, historically, in Britain, independent churches did not have elders.

The independents who were members of the Westminster Assembly, for example, were profoundly averse to the idea that in the church there were ruling elders as distinct from teaching elders.

[41 : 40] And independency, at the moment, in England, is trying to incorporate elders into its own historic structures, sometimes with fairly unhappy results.

But these are practical problems. Independency would have meant a situation where the local church answered to nobody else, not to presbyter, not to synod, not to assembly.

It was a self-contained entity. It had a pastor who preached, and it had deacons who ruled or who governed. I must modify that last point because it was also a feature of independency that the power lay with the church meeting.

Now, that again is subject to various modifications, but in our Presbyterian polity, the elders really lead and the elders really rule.

But in authentic and consistent independency, the church is not ruled by the pastor or ruled by the deacons.

[42 : 52] The church is ruled by the church meeting. And every member of the congregation is a member of the church meeting, and as I say in all the decisions.

In other words, rather than have a monthly meeting of the church session, you would have a monthly or at least regular meeting of the church to decide on the admission of new members and other such details.

Now, I have great respect for independence and respect for independence as well. And it is good to remind ourselves, for example, C.H. Spurgeon was in church polity, he was an independent.

It follows from this that in independency, every member admitted into the church must sign the constitution. It is as if we were to require every new communicant to sign our confession of faith.

Now, we don't require that because in our Presbyterian polity, the members don't run the church. And they don't need, therefore, to be conversed with the whole range of doctrine which we have in

our confession of faith.

[44 : 05] But it falls on the system and independency that all members have to subscribe to the whole of the constitution at a final level.

Now, the problem with independency, however much I say I respect it, is that it is really, in my view, a manifestation of an excessive concern for local autonomy.

And it leads to fragmentation and to a lack of coherence, which at the moment, in my judgment, is calamitously crippling English reformed evangelicalism.

It is so difficult to get those churches to cohere and to make some kind of united impact. Then we come to Presbyterianism, which for this audience at least is the preferred option.

And the option to which, obviously, I am personally biased. We are ourselves Presbyterians. I happen to believe that the New Testament indicates very, very few principles of church government.

[45 : 19] I happen to believe that, by and large, the New Testament indicates the merit of flexibility and adjustment to varying circumstances.

And I happen to believe that the New Testament makes very clear to us that structures exist for the Gospel and not the Gospel for structures. And I am very close to saying that any structure that helps us preach the Gospel is wholesome, healthy and acceptable.

There are, however, I think, in the New Testament, two or three principles which I think are fundamental in this area. One is the parity of elders and bishops.

That all elders, as far as authority goes, are equal. In the New Testament, the word elder and the word bishop mean exactly the same thing.

And in the New Testament, all elders are on the same plane and all bishops are on the same plane. And they function in the local churches as a collegiate oversight in which none is boss and none is dictator and none is the elder or the senior elder or any other combination of rank-oriented worlds.

[46 : 48] There is simply parity or equality among all the elders. Now that means that for myself and Mr Mackay, we have to accept the comparative humiliation that we are not superior to the elders.

We are simply ourselves on the same plane. And it is important for us to acknowledge that. That we are simply elders, bishops and our word has, as a word, the same merit as that of the others. Now that, of course, is without prejudice to another area altogether. That as far as teaching goes, Mr Mackay is the teacher-preacher in this congregation. That to me is quite independent of his function as elder and overseer.

At that level of proclamation and preaching, he has his own particular and special gift and his own particular and special calling. I don't believe that all elders have that gift or that all elders need to have that gift.

But I am concerned here to insist that when he sits in the Kirk session, he may be the chairman. But as chairman of the Kirk session, he has only a casting vote.

[48 : 05] And he accepts, as we must all accept, that all elders, bishops are equal. There is no particular bishop or boss in the collegiate Presbyterian oversight.

The second point is that in the Presbyterian polity, following the New Testament, there should be in every church a plurality of elders.

There should be more than one elder. We seem to find in the New Testament, for example, at Ephesus, that Paul called together the elders of the church. Now, that function, you see, is defined for a seer too in verse 28.

They were overseers. Those elders were bishops. Paul, we're told, call together the elders of the church in verse 17. It's the word elders.

In verse 28, it's the word bishops. Feed the church of God over which he has made you bishops. The elders are overseers. They are leaders. They are not delegates or shop stewards.

[49 : 08] Their function is not to find out what the congregation want and give it to them. Their function is to work out for themselves collegiately what is best for the congregation and lead the congregation.

And that, it never devolves upon one man. It falls on the body of elders. There is to be more than one elder, more than one overseer. I don't know how many bishops you have in St. Winston-Dy, but you certainly have more than one bishop.

And that's the way it's meant to be. All your elders are bishops. Now, I would be very, very happy if, as a result of tonight's talk, your minister and elders rose in your estimation, became kind of real giants.

That wouldn't be a bad thing at all. That you must see them as bishops. And you might begin to address them as such, I hope, with due reverence.

So we have here in this church a plurality of the Lord's bishops. And the third principle, which is German, essentially the Presbyterian polity, is what I'm going to put in the jargon word again, Connectionalism.

[50 : 23] Connectionalism. We've seen three things. The equality of elders, the plurality of elders, and Connectionalism.

I mean by that, that Presbyterianism, presuming upon New Testament warrant, takes the view that all the churches of God are connected.

And they should not exist as autonomous entities, as individual congregations. So, local churches are organized in a presbytery.

Presbyteries are organized in a synod. Synods organized in a general assembly. And in theory, all national assemblies organized in an ecumenical synod, embracing all the reformed churches.

Now, let me go back a little to what I said about independency. Independency emphasizes the autonomy of the local congregation.

[51 : 33] Independents suspect that in Presbyterian polity, our individual congregations have very little liberty. And they suspect that various assembly committees are always meddling in the affairs of the local churches.

Now, it is my perception that the Presbyterian polity of Scotland, as distinct from that of Wales, has given very, very firm emphasis to the Jew autonomy of local churches.

And in fact, it is very, very seldom that Presbyterians or Synods or Assemblies feel warranted in interfering in the internal affairs of a particular church.

It will do so usually only on invitation and only when a crisis warrants it. This connectionism, therefore, of which I speak, does not detract from the independence of the local church.

What it means is that local churches can cooperate, they can pool their resources, the strong can help the weak.

[52 : 53] For example, in the free church of Scotland, our sustentation fund assumes that we can place a minister in every parish in Scotland.

Provided the local, the big congregations are willing to remit to a central fund as much as they can. And out of that fund, we can pay a stipend for a man in a small congregation which could not possibly support a minister.

That's why, by and large, the free church historically in Scotland represents a fairly unusual phenomenon of a free church of national dimensions able to cope particularly with the problems of a rural ministry.

It is very difficult to provide gospel ordinances in rural areas unless you centralise and subsidise.

So, the connectionism which I speak, churches coming together, is not designed to allow them to meddle in each other's affairs.

It's designed to provide a structure of cooperation so that they can, for example, set up a college to train their ministers by agreed standards.

[54 : 16] They can devise a church extension policy which embraces the whole of Scotland. They can provide a strategy for overseas missions.

And all of these things, they are cooperating to make a wider vision possible. Now, that is the pragmatical merit. The theology of the days, in the New Testament, it seems clear, I think, that the local churches, for example, Jerusalem and Ephesus, were connected, were one.

The church in Judea was seen not simply as an aggregate of individual churches, but as the church of God in Judea. Well, let me again come back to my guiding principle.

The structures exist for the gospel. It is a sad thing when canon law gets in the way of evangelism. As the Lord said, the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath. So, structures were made for the gospel, not the gospel for structures.

[55 : 27] And sometimes we have to bend and to accommodate our confession. As a moral principle, you see, it speaks of churches not settled. And it says, well, in times of unsettledness, we can modify and adapt and accommodate to suit the particular situation.

And I think that is enormously important. That hanging on to essential principles, that one bishop must not lord it over another.

That one man must not lord it over a congregation. That one congregation must not live in isolation with other congregations. Yes, these are fundamental principles. But within those principles, what enormous scope there is, you see, for flexibility and adaptability to particular situations.

I'm going to say just a word on church unity, because, again, this is an area where evangelicals, I think, are fairly weak. I suppose I should begin by saying quite simply this, that the evangelical mentality today is often very much more concerned to find ground for separation than grounds for unity.

And we regard those two as symmetrical. In other words, we feel guilty about uniting with people. Now, by and large, you see, we do not need justification for union with people, or for cooperation with people.

[56 : 55] It is obvious, it is the first principle of the New Testament, that Christians cooperate. It is our separation and disavowal of each other that is problematical.

And we have been very cavalier, we have reacted to this thing called the ecumenical movement. I mean, there are people who are known as ecumenicals, as if it were a bad thing.

Now, it is a good thing to be ecumenical. The unity of God's church is enormously important. Now, the basis of that unity is the new birth.

All of us who are members of God's family are one with every other member of God's family.

If we have God for our father, we have every other Christian in the world for our brother and sister.

Now, that really is a remarkable and to me a thrilling fact.

[57 : 52] It doesn't matter what their denominational affiliation may be, what their peculiarities may be theologically. If they are in Christ, if they are born again, that's my sister, that's my brother.

Now, of course, you could say to me, ah, but if they are heretics, they are not born again. That's as maybe, you see. But I'm saying, if they are born again, then my brothers and my sisters, I am one with them.

And I must therefore express my oneness with them to the very utmost of my power. Now, the model that God has given to us solemnly for the expression of his unity is his own unity as the triune God.

That they may be one as we are one. Now, that really is very humbling. Devastating in some ways.

That all the Christians in the world should be as united as the three persons of the eternal trinity.

You'll never hear God the Father and God the Son quarrelling. You'll never hear them miscalling each other, using abusive language with regard to each other.

[59 : 07] You'll never find them discouraging each other. They are one. They love each other. They share with each other.

They cooperate. They live in and through each other. And the churches of God ought to present that same picture to us.

Now, it's through at two levels. It's through at the level of the local church that, which is the basic New Testament unit here, within the local congregation, there should be harmony to peace comparable to that which suffuses the very Godhead itself.

Relations between the various members of the church should be reflections of the relations between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

It is through, secondly, of relations between churches. And I put in there between denominations too, although there is a certain anachronism there.

[60 : 27] That Christian churches and denominations distinct, as God the Father is distinct from God the Son, are yet one.

That Christian churches and the church should love, should share, should encourage, should comfort, should help, should cooperate with each other.

Now, that is not some peripheral ideal. That is an absolutely fundamental and unequivocal New Testament guideline.

What is a heretic? A heretic is an unmedian, so you say to me. Now, in the New Testament, a heretic is a divisive man.

He is a man who causes divisions. A man who miscalls other Christians. A man who miscalls other churches.

[61 : 29] He is factious. He is divisive. That is what a heretic is. Now, of course, there is a link between the way we use the word and the New Testament use of the word.

The great trouble with false doctrine is it divides churches. But the evil of false doctrine is precisely that it divides churches.

Dividing the churches and evil. Fragmenting, fomenting discord. Behaving in a way that shows irresponsibility for the peace and harmony of the church of God.

Of an individual congregation. Or of inter-church relations. That is a great sin. Now, today we are, in my judgement, totally unrealistic about this whole situation.

There are many Christians in this land, far more than there are Marxists or secularists or Muslims. And yet because of a fragmentation, we are virtually impotent and powerless.

[62 : 41] Catholicism is united. So is secularism. So is Marxism. We really have to learn to abandon the age-old habit of majoring on the minor.

Of firing ourselves at brethren rather than firing ourselves at the enemy. If I were to listen to all the requests I get to write and speak of these things, I would spend my life fighting with those who argue that the authorized version is the only authentic version of God's word.

Or fighting those who maintain that we must worship God using only the psalms without instruments.

Fighting those battles. Pentecostals, Arminians, and so on. Until you realise, look, Christendom is collapsing round our ears.

We have to decide what battles are going to fight. Not waste our energy fighting our friends and brethren, members of our own family. After all, you tell me, there is a spiritual war going on.

[64 : 00] Well, during the war, you see, even the Labour Party and the Tory Party stopped fighting each other. We've been at war. We stop fighting each other.

We fight the enemy outside. That really is the great pragmatic importance of the unity of the Church of God. It is, therefore, something that we must be sensitive about.

Let us not divide our local church. Let us encourage the maximum possible interaction and cooperation between local churches and between denominations in this land and further afield.

Now, I've gone far beyond my time, and I'm sorry about that, but I'll leave it there. Thank you once again, Professor MacLeod.

And there is some time for questions, as usual. I should think that it's the sort of lecture, despite all its clarity, that dealt with subjects that are bound to prompt some questions.

[65 : 09] So, don't delay. Who would like to be first? Can I ask for this for a question? Yes.

Is there any distinction between the Christian poor and the poor within the Church, and the poor out of the Church? Certainly there is a distinction, I think we'd have to accept that we have to be concerned, in the first instance, for the poor in our own own family.

Or the poor in our own constituency. But I would not be too anxious to conclude that that's our whole responsibility.

I think the Church of God is a responsibility towards the poor defined more widely. But there's no doubt that here, charity does begin at home.

And the examples we have in Acts, for example, would indicate that, in the first instance at least, the concern was for the Christian poor. But the Lord himself showed us the example of responding to need wherever he found it.

[66 : 18] And the Good Samaritan, I think, also exemplifies that same principle, that we may be walking along the road and we may find a problem. This man isn't a Christian, but we have to help.

And certainly I take a bold primacy of our responsibility towards the Christian poor. But I think we ought to extend it beyond that.

And that's why, in fact, for example, we send medical missions to India and open schools in South America, because that's part of our diaconate. It's part of a compassionate ministry.

I think there's a question behind it. Sir, I'm wondering, in view of your views on bishops and elders, did you see an ordained ministry as a true mark of the Church, particularly in relation to preaching and the administration of the sacraments?

Well, you're putting me in rather a spot on that one. The difficulty is that the word ordained doesn't occur in the New Testament in that particular sense.

[67 : 25] And it comes, in fact, from the Latin word for order, which is a word for meaning a rank. And we have tended to take the view that in the Church of God you have a kind of military structure

with various ranks coming down from the minister to deacons and professors at the bottom of the pile.

Now, I think that's quite alien to the New Testament. But on the other hand, I think that there is a certain order, as you see from ordination. In other words, that the Church is asked to appoint certain people.

A preacher doesn't set up as a preacher. He is appointed a teacher by the Church itself and authorized to exercise a gift in that local situation.

And similarly, it's clear that the apostles appointed elders and deacons in the local situation. Now, if you're asking me whether there can be a Church, which is a true Church, which yet does not possess bishops or deacons or professors, the answer is yes.

But that is a Church in a fairly embryonic situation. And one would hopefully move on to becoming a pure Church, which would have professors, which you can't have a pure Church at all.

[68 : 44] But structures, I would still insist, are secondary. It's a Gospel that matters. Yes. Yes.

Yes. Yes. The reading in the Church and the reading today is for praying for the victory. Do you just mention prayer or talk?

Well, I would assume prayer along with singing under the rubric of worship, which is the vertical Godward-directed movement of the Church.

And certainly that's a useful corrective to what I said. But I would take the view that to worship God means to pray to God and to sing to God and to praise God.

And I would regard that whole dimension of our spirituality as of enormous importance. And it's obvious that in the Book of Acts, the Church of God, the people met at least every day and sometimes all day some of them.

[69 : 50] Such was their zeal at the time. And the emphasis that I made earlier on with regard to the importance of the contemporary, that it wasn't simply private closet prayer, but it was very much apparently prayed together that was important to them.

And I do think that certainly is important. Yes.

Excuse me, Professor MacLeod. How probable or possibly think it is for a born-again Christian to belong to the Roman Catholic Church?

Well, I'm not sure whether it's a theological or a mathematical question. How possible? It certainly is possible.

It's like the questions you face in Trinity, to what extent? The most difficult of all questions for students to answer. That's why I'm so fond of them. But it would be foolhardy to say that you cannot be a born-again Christian and be a Roman Catholic.

[71 : 07] In fact, to put it both ways, we cannot say that you cannot be converted in and by the Church of Rome. For example, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Oxford all converted in the Church of Rome.

And therefore, it is possible indeed to be born again in the Church of Rome. It is possible also to remain in the Church of Rome being born again.

And it is possible to die from some of its services, food for one's own soul. And I think I would escape from your question to the parallel question, the parallel issue, whether we can remain as born again in liberal and modernist churches.

Because if I were asked which is the greater departure from God's word, I would say that a liberal church, and I don't mean liberal denomination, but a congregation where the preaching is liberal in the sense that it preaches the message of Rudolf Bultmann, for example.

That to me is a very much more serious position than the position of Roman Catholic congregation. Where at least the Lord's deity and atoning death and such fundamental doctrines are preached coherently.

[72 : 26] I do feel that it is also incumbent on me, whatever the personal risk, to remind us that there has been a counter-reformation as well as a very evil apostasy.

And that some of the abuses of the 16th century are no longer with us in the Church of Rome. And also that in the 20th century, certain highly important Protestant principles have in fact made their appearance in the Church of Rome, especially the emphasis on Bible reading.

Which at one time was forbidden to Roman Catholics, but it is now very much encouraged. And in the wake of the charismatic movement with all its problems, we know that in the Church of Rome, there are significant groups of people meeting for prayer and Bible study.

And I have every confidence that such people are born again. And certainly, at a theological level, in for example, Christology, some of the best work is coming from Roman Catholic theologians, some of the worst coming from Protestants.

So, while I think that it is certainly important to maintain our polemic and controversy with Rome, I would have to say that in the 20th century, for various reasons, it really has been modified.

[73 : 57] And the question, in fact, now that has to be asked is whether the current Pope is undoing some of the work of his predecessors, or that happened to other predecessors. Vatican II, for all the fact that extreme Protestants say, it changed nothing, did change a great deal.

And the attempts are being made, in fact, to scuttle Vatican II. So, I am saying we simply can't say Roman Catholics, therefore not born again.

I wonder if I could ask a question, Professor MacLeod, well, ask if you would like to comment on the importance of the Church, the gathering being local.

It's a topic that, when we talk about church polity, comes up quite a lot, particularly in a city context. And I think perhaps I'm particularly thinking of it in relationship to the problem that some have, who emphasise the importance of the local church.

And because they can gather locally in a congregation where there are other born again Christians, feel that that's the most important thing to do. Even though perhaps the preaching in that congregation may not be uncompromisingly the preaching of the whole Gospel.

[75 : 23] Yes. Well, it's taken me again into the area of pragmatics. Certainly, I wouldn't go to a local church which did not preach the Gospel.

And if the local church happens to be either heretical in that sense or muted its emphasis on fundamental truth, then one doesn't go to it at all.

But many other things enter into the choice of a church. And if you're saying, should I go to the nearest church? I think that simply reflects partly the legacy of the old parish system, which was territorial.

And folk went to their nearest parish church. And it also, I think, ignores the importance of sociological and cultural factors in choosing what church to go to.

And basically, I'm saying through all this waffle that I would never be a party to a presbytery directing that a free church folk could live next to what a party can hire and must go to the party can not go to the Minstern Street.

[76 : 31] They must be able to go where I think they want to go, where their own souls are being fed. I don't want any tyranny of that kind. And I suppose that it is part of the problem of Protestant individualism, the rights of individual conscience, that we get a certain amount of chaos.

But the theology of it is, we do not go to an impure church and we can find a pure church. And I would be more anxious myself to go to a pure one than to go to the local one.

I don't think that there is any sanctity in local. I don't want to go into this too much detail. But we have to accept that today people do not form associations and social bonds on a geographical basis.

Urban life is not organised territorially. It is organised on the basis of shared interests and common activities. And people socialise in their places of work and recreation.

They tend not to socialise in their area of residence. And it would be an encounter to the whole psychology of urbanism in the modern world to insist that you go to the nearest church.

[77 : 52] So you are safe enough. You are making me feel very guilty now. All these things were not quite the psychology of the question. Although they may be part of my psychology and it has been very helpful.

Any other question? Yes. Can I ask, do you feel there is an Indian Testament basis at all for the other structure of the church, which we often see where there is apostles, prophets, mantras, and there is that hierarchy of government within the church?

Well, I am myself very unsympathetic to that point of view. I think that apostles had to be many who had seen the risen Christ. And I think that that office perished with the last of the twelve apostles. And with regard to prophets, I know that today men claim that office. But they also listen on to that they are not carrying divine revelation.

Now to me a prophet in the Bible is somebody who has had an audience with God and comes forth and says, this is what God has told me to tell you. And it presupposes that God had secrets which he hadn't yet revealed.

[79 : 15] Now my position is that what the Bible calls the mystery that is God's secret is now fully out. And that God has nothing to add to it. So we don't need any more prophets or apostles because we have the whole truth in Holy Scripture.

And men like, well, Christian preachers are expositors of the written word. They are not bringing you revelations. And nobody has any right to command you or me to do anything in his own name. Or in God's name unless he can provide biblical warrant for what he says. He can't say, do it because I say so. Or do it because I say God says so.

He must say, do it because the Bible says so. And if he cannot say that, then my conscience is not bound. And I think that there are very grave dangers in the current movement in some parts of Britain towards shepherding and covering and all those other phenomena which really just allow all sorts of men to set up as petty popes and some as not so petty popes.

I really cherish my freedom as a Protestant under the word of God. And I don't want to return to a medieval Catholic situation where there is a mediator.

[80 : 37] between me and God. I don't go to an apostle or prophet. I go to the Bible for myself. I'm sure you do too. Thank you. I think we could have one more question before David Ford perhaps would pray with us at the conclusion.

Now I thought that we would have a question from Reverend Donny Smith home from Peru. It's lovely to have you Donny and I thought you couldn't sit quiet for a whole quick evening knowing you're from college days.

What a reputation! You're more than ever. I think we could have one more question. I'm very interested in the distinction between a true and a pure church.

It seems to me that there's a tension and not a contradiction in what was explained. For example, we have a duty to look for unity with any other true church.

But you said there was quite another question that you wouldn't go to an impure church. So what exactly is the importance of looking for unity with a true church if you think that true church is not very pure therefore you don't go to it?

[81 : 57] Well I think again it's a pragmatic issue Donny. I think that by and large if one starts from a base one goes to the purest church one can find.

Not simply to the true church one finds but to the purest church that one can conveniently find and conveniently attend. But it may be that in some parts of the world we don't have that luxury.

We may be in a place where there is only one church which is relatively impure and some folk would say well I'm staying in the house I'm not going to that church because it is so impure.

And yet it may be true in the sense that it has the bare fundamentals of Christian truth. And it offers some fellowship, it offers some discipline, it offers some hope of evangelism and so on.

And I would think again that union certainly is going to be variable. That the degree of intimacy with which I would associate with churches would depend a great deal on their different positions.

[83 : 13] For example the free church can relate very easily to reformed Baptist congregations.

There are more problems for us, for myself for example in getting involved with Anglican congregations or with shall I say a Roman Catholic congregation.

And yet one has to relate to all of those conscious that the world is watching how we Christians who are just one block to them are getting on with one another.

And I can put it in terms maybe of one simple practical problem. Whom do we admit as visitors to the Lord's table? We say that visitors are welcome to come.

Well does that mean free church folk from Sky are welcome to come? Does it mean CFS folk from Sky are welcome to come? Does it mean that members of any Protestant church in the world are welcome to come?

Does it mean that a member of Roman Catholic Church is welcome to come to the table? Or a member of the Orthodox Church in Romania or Greece or Russia or wherever? No, my position if I may say it publicly here is that I am prepared to welcome to the Lord's table an authentic member of any branch of Christendom, any branch of the Church of God.

[84 : 41] I paradoxically and I suppose in new terms with some measure of contrariness would not have that operated in the opposite direction.

I would not go to the Lord's table in every branch of the Christian Church. I would not go to Roman Catholic Mass. But I would allow to the Lord's table a Catholic who wanted to come to the Lord's table.

So I don't think we can say that there is something called unity. I mean in the family itself I think there are degrees of intimacy between various members that we have to work on at that. But the tragedy is that we are biting and devouring one another. And my judgment on that is that you never bite and devour today another branch of the Christian Church. The discourse must be reasoned and must be courteous with them. But the Dutch brethren as you know won't wear this distinction between a true church and a pure church. [85 : 41] They insist if it is pure it is true. But that has not been our professional position and that bothers them too of course.

I think we will stop before we ask any more questions. Well I am sure we want to. But I think time does mean that we will have to stop there. But as always Professor MacLeod is usually able to wait just for a little while afterwards and for those of you who want to speak to him personally there will be opportunity.

And we do thank him for that ministry that he exercises amongst us each time he comes. As well as the more public ministry that we all appreciate. As on other occasions too after our time together is finished there are the tapes of previous lectures on ship's sail at the back.

And also some of Professor MacLeod's books on sale. And you can avail yourselves of these opportunities. There is a collection plate for those of you who want to join with us in defraying the costs of these lectures.

And the next lecture God willing will be on January the 25th. Now that will be a fortnight tonight. And the subject of that lecture will be Christian baptism.

[86 : 55] Now these are the sort of intimations that I always make at this stage. But just to create a little bit of interest I've got one new intimation tonight. I had a telephone call just before I came out asking if I could share with the Christian family that would be here the need that a Romanian pastor and his family have who are over in this country and the pastor is studying theology.

And they have need at this time of a double bed. If anyone can help with that need then I can give you a contact telephone number. Now Dr Ford please and we'll stand for prayer.

Almighty God in heaven. We lift our hearts to you in thankfulness for the gift of your son.

And for the establishing of his kingdom in this world. And for own personal part in the church of your son.

And we bless you our God that church extends throughout our globe. And we rejoice in our brethren from different nations.

[88 : 09] speaking different languages. Speaking different languages. And yet worshipping you the one true living God. And we bless you almighty one for the opportunity which we have to serve in the church of your son in our own local congregations.

We bless you for those who are our colleagues in the work. We bless you for those who engage in different aspects of the church's ministry and for the different gifts which you have bestowed upon the local congregations.

And we ask oh Lord as we would seek to serve you. Grant to us that zeal for Jesus Christ and for his word. Grant to us to be holy in our personal lives.

And have that concern for purity within the church. We ask our God for your blessing upon our involvement within the diaconal work of the church.

Grant to us that true love for our neighbour. And that true thoughtfulness for our brethren. We think of this personal need which has been brought before us this night.

[89 : 22] And we commit that to you and pray for your undertaking in that matter. Now Lord be pleased to grant your blessing to rest upon us this night. Take us to our homes in safety.

And those we praise in Christ's name. Amen.