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The constitution of the apostolic church

A THESIS

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THE CONSTITUTION OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH.

While every one must recognize a supernatural factor in the rise and growth of the christian church, yet the church follows an historic sequence in its development. Therefore it is open to historical study which goes beyond the mere chronology of facts; in other words, the church should be studied as a living institution conforming to general principles of institutional growth.

This is in no way irreverend. It is but the tracing of the method of a methodical God in revealing himself to a fallen race.

In no place is the adjustment of human condition to the plan of the Divine more fully revealed than in the historic setting of the coming of the Christ.

The fullness of time had come. The world was ready for a fuller revelation. By long centuries of discipline, the Jews had come to be thoroughly monotheistic. One by one the premessianic prophecies had been fulfilled. The political pride of Israel was humbled by a foreign yoke. Disputes as to the meaning of the law had become bitter, giving rise to the sects of the Pharaisees, the Sadusees, and the Essenes. There was a heart craving that was unsatisfied by the spiritless formalism that had come to the Jewish worship. A great longing for a political and religious deliverer had become general. Israel was expecting the Messiah. The social, political, and religious conditions of the Jews were favorable to the mission of the Christ, especially among the common people.

The condition of the pagan world was also ripe for the introduction of Christianity.

Centuries of Greek life had developed a language alike marvelous for flexibility, delicacy of shading and exactness of thought expression. Minds had been trained to philosophic breadth of thought and penetrating acuteness.

These centuries had also proved the helplessness of man in his struggle to attain unto a knowledge of God.

However much we may admire the moral conceptions of Socrates or the lofty idealism of Plato, we must admit that they fell far short of human needs.

The later history of Greece shows how vain were these strivings after better things in so far as the improvement of the moral condition of the masses was concerned.

Rome had also done her part in preparing the world for the Christ. Rome had risen from the camp of a migrating tribe to be mistress of the world. With her legions and her laws, she had welded the world into one vast unit. Govermental relations led to commercial intercourse. Commercial and political expansion lead to travel and broader mental life.

This intercourse made Greek the language of commerce and Latin the language of the law. Thus were linguistic vehicles prepared for the wide dissemination of the gospel.

Roman roads, Roman messengers, and annual feasts contributed to the same end.

Pagan religions were largely national. Loss of political power shook the faith of many in their national religion. Larger intellectual life had led not a few to reject the superstition and mythology of their fathers.

Nothing had come to take the place of these failing religions. Moral conditions as described in the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans led to the realization of the need of stronger moral bonds.

Thus, "in the fullness of time," we find the Jews trained by centuries of theocratic national life that they might become the channel of revelation, the Greek language developed to the highest grade of excellence and widely desseminated, the Roman empire at the height of its political power maintaining open ways of communication and ready to defend its citizens even in the remotest provinces, while the crumbling and decay of old religious systems had led to moral conditions that must drive men to the coldness of formalism, the hopelessness of skepticism or the quickening influences of a new and living faith.

Under these conditions, Jesus Christ, the Son of God,[1] the Savior[2] of the world, came to introduce and establish[3] Christianity. However, Christ did not formulate a new church organization. This is shown by the fact that he and his desciples worshiped[4] with the Jews and that the two sacraments, the entry ways of the church, were not instituted[5] until near the close of Christ's ministry.

Jesus did gather desciples[6] to whom he did commit[7] the founding of the church. To further this end, he ordained apostles[8] and elders[9], and carefully instructed[10] his followers.

1. Matt. 26^{63-67}
2. Rom. 5^{6} Acts 4^{12}
3. Eph. 2^{20}.
4. Matt. 12^{8}. Luke 21^{37}, 4^{16}, 24^{53}, John 6^{59}.
5. Matt. 26^{26-29}, 28^{19}. Mark 16^{15}
6. Matt. 4^{18}, 4^{21}, Mark 2^{14}, John 1^{43-45}, 4^{16}, 4^{39}, 4^{41}.
7. Matt. 16^{18}
8. Matt. 10^{1-4} Mark 2^{14} Luke 6^{13-16}.
9. Luke 10^{1-22}.
10. Matt. $5-7$, 10^{5-42} Mark 9^{35-50}, 10^{23-31} Luke 6^{20-49}, 9^{1-6}, 12^{22-49}, 13^{31-35}, 16^{1-31}, 17^{1-10}, 24^{44-49} John 21^{15-17}.

In obedience to the commands[1] of Christ the desciples tarried at Jerusalem. The time of waiting was devoted to prayer.[2] Prayer now took on a new significance. They no longer approached a great unknown God through sacrafice, but raised the voice of their supplication to their beloved Master who had just ascended to heaven to plead their cause. "God manifest in the flesh" had made prayer a communion with a known and beloved friend. They showed their faith by preparing for future work. They filled up the number of the apostles by the election of Matthias.[3]

After ten days came the answer to prayer in a baptism of fire.[4] The desciples were endued[5] with power and spake with tongues[6] so that free salvation[7] was effectively preached to all, and 3000 were converted.[8]

Thus beginning with only 120 desciples[9] the church grew in numbers rapidly.[10] In obediance to the command of Christ[11] the church at Jerusalem was confined to the Jews.[12] Christians still observed the Mosaic law,[13] their organization being a very simple[14] society within the Jewish church. They were held together by heart unity[15] rather than by organization. This unity expressed itself in community of goods.

The gradual separation of this Christian society from the Jewish church was the natual effect of a very great difference in doctrine. The Jews did not accept such cardinal doctrines of Christianity, as Christ the man of phophecy,[17] Christ raised from the dead,[18] the Holy Ghost among men,[19] and salvation through Jesus.[20]

1. Luke 24[49]
2. acts 1[14].
3. acts 1[23-26]
4. acts 2[3].
5. acts 1[8], 2[28]
6. Acts 2[4].
7. acts 2[47]
8. acts 2[41].
9. acts 1[15].
10. acts 2[41], 2[47], 4[4], 5[14], 6[7].
11. matt. 10[6].
12. Acts 3[26]
13. acts 3[1]
14. Matt. 10[1-4], Luke 10[1].
15. acts 4[32].
16. acts 4[34]
17. acts 2[24-28] 3[18]
18. Acts 2[24], 3[15], 5[30].
19. acts 2[23]
20. acts 2[38-39], 3[19], 5[31].

The separation was hastened by bitter persecution.[1] That this hostility was directed against Christian doctrine, and not against mere individuals, is shown by their treatment of Paul[2] a favorite of the Jews, after his conversion. However, the persecutions, by scattering the Christians, widened the field of their activity.[3] Not only did this dispersion increase the territory touched by the Gospel, but it also carried the Word beyond the pale of Judaism. Philip preached to the Samaritans, a mixed race[4], having no dealings[5] with the Jews.

This was a great step toward realizing the true breadth of Christianity. When the apostles sent[6] Peter and John to Samaria, they triumphed over Jewish prejudice, and launched the church on its world wide mission. After the work at Samaria was established, Philip met the eunuch, and sent the Gospel into Egypt.[7]

We are also impressed with the number of churches mentioned in the Acts as existing at this early date. Among these is the church at Damascus[8], at Lydda[9], at Joppa[10], at Phenice[11], in Cypres[12], and at Antioch.[13]

The founding of the church at Antioch is of great historical importance. It marks the beginning of the preaching of the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Antioch[14] was a great city, ranking next to Rome and Alexandria in population and commercial importance. It was one of the great centers where the East and the West mingled. Here men of culture abounded, and the liberal arts flourished.[15]

1. Acts 4^{1-3}, $5^{17\,18}$, 7^{57-60}.
2. Acts 9^{24}, 9^{29}.
3. Acts 8^{1}, 8^{4}.
4. II Kings 17^{24} et seq.
5. John 4^{9}.
6. Acts 8^{14}.
7. Acts 8^{37-39}.
8. Acts 9^{2}
9. " 9^{35}
10. " 9^{36}
11. " 11^{19}
12. " 11^{19}
13. " 11^{19-21}
14. Josephus - Bell. Judaic III 2
15. Cicero - Pro arch. Poeta c III

The church at Antioch was founded by converts from Cypres and Cyrene, who spoke to the heathen.[1] Many were converted. Thus the first church outside of Judaism was founded. The world's gate was open to Christian missions.

This first Gentile church grew with great rapidity.[2] Here Barnabus and Saul spent one year of their early ministry.[3] It was here that the Christian church received its name.[4] From this place Paul set out on his missionary journeys. Thus Antioch became, in a way, the Jerusalem of the Gentile world.

At about this time,[5] by special revelation, Peter's eyes were opened to the world mission of the Gospel.[6] In obedience to the vision, Peter preached to the Gentiles in Caesarea,[7] and the Holy Ghost fell on them,[8] and they were baptized.[9]

The events both at Antioch and at Caesarea show the expansion of Christianity beyond the limits of Judaism.

1. acts 11^{20}
2. acts 11^{21+24}
3. " 11^{21}
4. " 11^{26}
5. It is not clear the events at Caesarea or those at Antioch transpired first.
   See - Cambride Bible - the acts, 11^{22},
6. 10^{9-18}
7. acts 10^{34}
8. " 10^{44-45}
9. " 10^{48}

The violation of the Mosaic law incident to this expansion became a subject of contention[1], but was settled in favor of the Gentiles[2], but it was only step by step that the apostles rid themselves of Jewish prejudice.

Persecution was again renewed.[3] James became the second of a long list of Christian martyrs. But, in spite of opposition, the church grew.[4] When the dividing line between Jews and Gentiles had once been crossed, the growth became very rapid.

Paul was the great apostle of the Gentiles. Wherever he went, he left a line of churches to mark his path. The territorial extension of Christianity may be indicated by outlining Paul's three missionary journeys.

First:- Antioch.
Salamis.
Cypres.

Paphos.

Asia Minor.

Perga.

Antioch in Pisidia.

Iconium.

Derbe.

Lystra.

Antioch.

1. Acts 11[2]
2. " 11[18]
3. " 12
4. " 12[24]

Second:- Antioch.

Syria.

Cilicia.

Phrygia.

Colosse.
Hierapolis (Epaphras).
Laodicea.

Galatia.

Troas.

Europe.

Neapolis.
Philipi.
Thessalonica.
Berea.
Athens.
Corinth.

Ephesus.

Caesarea.

Jerusalem.

Antioch.

Third:- Antioch.

Phrigia.

Galatia.

Ephesus.

Crete.

Corinth.

Ephesus.

Macedonia.

Corinth.

Troas.

Miletus.

Tyre.

Caesarea.

Jerusalem.

Caesarea.

Rome.

During this time the other apostles were not inactive in extending the boundaries of Christendom. We have few details of their labors. James, the brother of our Lord, worked at Jerusalem. The epistle of Jude shows that he worked in a region infected with agnosticism, probably Ephesus.

Andrew, Peter's brother, is said to have worked in Sythia, John in Asia, Peter in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia.[1] Peter also worked among the Jews in Babylon.[2]

Matthew carried the Gospel into Arabia. At least, his Gospel was found in the language of that country.[3] He was followed by Bartholomew.

This missionary work is said to have reached as far as India. Mathias devoted himself to Ethiopia,[4] James, the son of Alphaeus, to Egypt.[5] Thaddeus ministered in Edessa.[6]

A mass of mixed fable and tradition joins with good historic evidence in supporting the statement of Eusebius.

"The apostles and disciples of the Savior, scattered over the whole world, preached the Gospel everywhere."[7]

1. Eusebius III 1.
2. 1 Peter 5:13.
3. Euseb. V 10.
4. Nicephorus II 40
5. Presseusé - Early yrs. of ch. chmah. p. 208.
6 Euseb. I 13

7. Euseb. III 1.

Thus, before the death of the apostles, we find the church well established. Now let us consider its organization.

Before entering on this subject, it will be necessary for us to rid ourselves of the later distinction between clergy and laity. The difference between desciples, deacons, elders, bishops, and apostles was in office, not in kind. The ministry of the apostolic church was not a priesthood. This is shown by the use of the word priest in the New Testament.[1]

The unity of the church amid a variety of gifts is forcibly expressed by Paul.[2] The privilege of public address was open to all.[3] Even the sacraments were not confined to the ministerial hands.[4]

In the "Commentarioo" attributed to Ambrose, we read that in the beginning all taught and all baptized at every opportunity.

According to Justin,[5] the individual members of the congregation, and not the acting officials, are the acting subjects in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Tertullian[6] bases the right of every Christian to administer the sacraments on the universal priesthood of the faithful.

Alongside of this idea of universal priesthood, there developed in course of time another idea of directly opposite character.

1. Rev. 1^6, I Peter 2^3, 2^6, 2^9.
3. I Cor. 14^{26-33}.
2. Eph. 4^{11-16}
4. I Cor. 10^{16-17}.
5. Dial. 117
6. De exh. Cast. 7

In Africa people first became used, in what manner is not known,[1] to designate bishops and presbyters as sacerdotes.

As soon as a distinction between members and officers, as between priests and laymen, had been established, the Old Testament idea of priesthood began to creep in.

The ministry became mediatorial. In the time of Cyprian this change had been established.[2] The priest, and not the congregation, had become the acting subject in celebrating the Eucharist.

If we have thus divested our minds of the distinction between clergy and laity, and have reached a sympathetic understanding of the simplicity of primitive church organization, we are prepared to consider its government.

The government of the apostolic church had many democratic elements, though it was not a pure democracy. The pre-eminence of the apostles gave them commanding influence that developed into actual authority. This authority does not seem to have been exercised in an arbitrary manner.

By the united action of the whole company Matthias was elected bishop.[3] By choice of the multitude seven men were made deacons.[4]

While there is not a clear account of the organization of a governing presbytery in each congregation, we may infer from Cyprian's account[5] of later procedure that it require the sufferage of all to constitute a presbyter.

1. Probably from the influence of pagan worship.
2. Cyprian - Epp. LV, 8; LVI, 3; LXI, 1.
3. Acts 1.16-26
4. " 45
5. Lightfoot, p. 237. Ante Nicene Fathers, vol. V, p. 370-371.

As has been shown, the sacradotal character of ministerial offices was an idea that came into the church some years after pentecost. All desciples were free to serve God according to their gifts.[1] Thus was there liberty in the primitive church, and each had a part in government.

Oligarchic and monarchial tendencies developed later, and will be considered in another place.

In organization, the church passed through stages of growth. Institutions are not made, they grow.

The officiary of the church developed gradually. As new needs came, new offices were created. Just after pentecost, the college of apostles wwas the head of the church. When numbers had increased, the apostles found themselves overburdened with duties. Deacons were elected and ordained to care for material interests.[2]

So rapid was the spread of Christianity that the apostles soon needed assistance in government and discipline. There were many heresees and eclectic systems to be guarded against. A college of elders, called a presbytery,[3] was organized to meet this need.[4]

It is not clear that elders were always preachers or teachers. Some things point to the contrary. The primary function of the presbytery was to take the lead in general government. It was their duty to provide for the delivery of divine truth, and to watch over the spiritual welfare of the church.[5]

1. I Cor. 12.
2. Acts 4.
3. I Tim. 4[14].
4. Neander - Hist. of the Planting of Christianity - vol. 1, p. 35.
5. " do. vol. 1, p. 36.