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Commentary — From the Margins The Greater Church

Recently an issue arose over which an alleged disciple took offense. This individual felt that he wasn't heard, and he wished to take his offense before the Church. One problem immediately became apparent: who or what constitutes the Church?

The Church is not a building, nor a denomination. It is the called-out ones, the collection of all who have been drawn by God the Father and called by Christ Jesus. This drawing and calling causes the individual, a son [or daughter] of disobedience, to mentally or spiritually leave the world through beginning to live by the laws of God that have been written upon the person's heart and placed in the person's mind. When this person was yet far from God and actually hostile to God (Rom 8:7), the person was chosen by God to become a son through birth from above. This person didn't first choose God, didn't first choose to turn his or her life over to God. This person didn't first make the decision to accept Jesus as his or her personal savior. Rather, God selects who receives spiritual birth in this age. Unless a person is foreknown to God (Rom 8:29), the person's chance for salvation occurs following death and resurrection, occurs in the great White Throne Judgment; for today is only *a* [indefinite article] day of salvation.

Once foreknown and drawn (John 6:44, 65), a person's choice is whether to accept spiritual judgment through joining himself or herself to the Body of Christ by the ritual of baptism, the symbolic act of killing the old person whom God consigned to disobedience (Rom 11:32). Judgment follows death; it doesn't precede death for human beings. Therefore, until a death occurs, there can be no judgment. But judgment is today upon the household of God (compare Heb 9:27 with 1 Pet 4:17). Thus, the entirety of the Body of Christ (i.e., the Church) has taken, as far as God is concerned, actual death upon itself through baptism.

In order for an actual death to occur without the loss of life, a person must necessarily be born a second time, this birth being from above and coming through receiving the Holy Spirit, though receiving a second life from the receipt of the Breath of God [*Pneuma 'Agion*]. Hence, all Christians have been born once of water (i.e., of the water of the womb), and once of Spirit: i.e., all have received life in the heavenly realm in the same manner as Adam received life in this physical realm. Living human beings are spiritual corpses in the same way as Adam was a physical corpse until Elohim breathed the breath of life into his nostrils (Gen 2:7). Through receipt of the breath of life, Adam became a breathing creature, a *naphesh*. He was a one-off creation, as is every Christian today. Until the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all flesh in a manner foreshadowed by what happened on the day of Pentecost that followed Calvary, every *Christian* is drawn and called one at a time. When the Holy Spirit is poured out upon all flesh, even the nature of the great predators will change. The lion will lie down with the lamb. And the Holy Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh (Joel 2:28) when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of the Most High and His Christ (Rev

11:15 & Dan 7:9–14). This will happen when Satan and his angels are cast from heaven halfway through seven years of tribulation (Rev 12:9–10). Satan will then no longer reign over the sons of disobedience through being the prince of the power of the air.

But spiritual birth through an individual's drawing and calling has not been the teaching of the greater Christian Church. This is not a teaching that can be used for political gain, not a teaching upon which great cathedrals can be built, not a teaching that produces employment for individuals and financial stability for institutions. It is not a democratic teaching. Therefore, spiritual birth through being foreknown, predestined, called, and justified goes against the Greco-Roman values of the modern Western world.

It is the anti-democratic nature of being foreknown, drawn and called that has prevented understanding of what being *born again*, or *born-from-above* signifies from being taught in the modern era of the Church. The Church collectively no more understands what being born of Spirit means than did Nicodemus. All of humanity will receive one chance for salvation—and only one! For most everyone, this chance will occur during the great White Throne Judgment, when all who have lived without being foreknown and drawn will be resurrected and judged. In this resurrection, they will receive life from above. They will be alive for a short while in a manner analogous to the two lawbreakers crucified with Jesus at Calvary. If they seek to save their returned lives, they will judge themselves unworthy of spiritual life; if they acknowledge their guilt and ask to be remembered, they will be glorified. So God is only undemocratic in that He chooses when a person will receive the person's only chance for salvation. God is not a respecter of persons, offering salvation to one person and not to another. God offers salvation to all who have drawn the breath of life. Thus, if a person is in this age drawn and called, the old nature of the person is also as the lawbreakers crucified with Jesus were. If the person's old nature seeks to save its life, the person will lose both his or her physical life as well as the person's spiritual life.

For most *Christians*, the Church consists of those disciples who believe as they do—and this is the ultimate form of an antidemocratic belief system. Thus, Latter Day Saints tend to label all other self-identified Christians as Gentiles. The Roman Church accepts Protestants as errant daughters, but will label a Latter Day Saint a heretic. Conservative Lutherans will not accept liberal Lutherans as genuine disciples; Baptists will not accept some other Baptists as genuine. Seventh Day Adventists do not accept Sabbath-keeping disciples taught by Herbert Armstrong as genuine, and vice versa. And this listing who doesn't accept whom as genuine could carry on for pages.

A genuine Christian is anyone drawn and called, baptized for the death of the old self, and who mentally leaves the world and begins to live as Jesus lived. Through receipt of the Holy Spirit, this person has the laws of God written on his or her heart and mind. This person knows right from wrong, knows the commandments, and keeps them to the best of the person's ability. This person is holy through being drawn and called. This person now lives as one who has been

made holy, or this person is a hypocrite. And no hypocrite—anyone who knows to do right and chooses not to—will enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 5:20). The person's righteousness must exceed that of the Pharisees, who had the law of God but didn't keep it (John 7:19).

The Church consists of all genuine disciples, regardless of denominational affiliation. Genuine disciples will, most likely, be found in every denomination; for genuine disciples are identified through their production of the fruit of the Spirit. Everyone who knows Christ Jesus keeps His commandments (1 John 2:3–4), for His commandments are written on their hearts and in minds. But the Church does not consist of just those individuals who today keep the Sabbath on the seventh day as all disciples should. Nor does it consist of just those Sabbath-keepers baptized by any particular organization. As many false brethren exist in Sabbath-keeping fellowships as exist in Sunday-keeping fellowships. Thus, an unknown Sabbath-keeper choosing to be offended has not more spiritual standing in a fellowship that is not his or her own than does the Pope in Rome have in a Sabbath-keeping fellowship, or the Prophet from Salt Lake City have in the Vatican.

Jesus said that a person would recognize His disciples by their love for one another.

The English linguistic icon *love* has been assigned so many objects [i.e., meanings] that the icon is virtually worthless. This is an objection Sir Thomas More had to the translation of Master Tynsdale. And this remains a valid objection to using love as a test of who is a genuine disciple of Christ Jesus.

Upon His coming, the Messiah will, in love, kill everyone who has taken the mark of the beast. When the Church rebels against God 2300 days before all things are restored, God will, in love, send a great delusion over those who have rebelled so that they cannot repent; God will, in love, condemn them to the lake of fire while they are yet alive. For ancient Israel's release from physical bondage, God, in love, ransomed Egypt by killing their firstborn of man and beast (Isa 43:3). For spiritual Israel's release from spiritual bondage, God will, in love, [ransom](#) spiritual Babylon's firstborn by killing a third of humanity (this is the event that begins seven years of tribulation, the hard labor pains of the Church giving birth to many sons of God). And many self-identified Christians will immediately object and say, *My God would never do that*. Their god might not, but the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will.

Love at times means making hard decisions, means doing what is best for another person regardless of the cost to oneself. When more than one person is involved, such as in a family situation, love requires prioritizing what is best for all involved. A husband cannot give, to the detriment of his family, all of his resources away to help a neighbor; yet the husband remains his brother's keeper as shown in Jesus' example of the Good Samaritan. Thus, a disciple, in love, will fight for his or her brother, sister, or neighbor before he or she will fight for himself or herself. And at times, love means resisting the evil of this world with all that is lawful for a Christian to use.

The brotherly love that the Asia Minor city of Philadelphia represented was that of a younger brother fighting to win a kingdom for his older brother. Jesus gives every generation of drawn and called disciples as His foreknown younger brothers (Rom 8:29–30) the opportunity to fight to win the kingdom He has already won. This fight isn't with swords or with bullets, but with [words and ideas](#). His kingdom is not of this world. If it were, then His disciples would bear arms in their fight for Him. But since His kingdom is of heaven and of the world to come, the fight is for righteousness, for living one's life as a light to the world, for teaching newly drawn and called disciples to live as spiritual Judeans while continuing to dwell in Babylon until that spiritual kingdom falls halfway through seven years of tribulation.

Too many disciples will not fight for righteousness. They will not fight against the law of sin and death that dwells in their members (Rom 7:25). They will not fight against spiritual wickedness. They are confused pacifists. They will wait for God to do their fighting for them. They will wait for God to spiritually clean them up; they will wait for God to drive out the wicked spirits that reign over them. They will not fight for their brother; they will not lay down their lives for their brother.

When contending with Satan, Jesus rebuked the devil. He didn't wait for His Father to rebuke Satan. He correctly cited the Word of God back to Satan, then commanded Satan to leave. And by the authority the glorified Jesus bestowed upon His disciples—not upon any denomination—foreknown sons of God have the power to retain or forgive sins (John 20:23). This authority to retain or forgive sins is the power of Christ Himself, so Jesus has given to His younger brethren His power. With faith, disciples can do what He did, even to driving out the moneychangers from the temple of God (disciples are today the temple).

Genuine disciples use the cloak of grace to practice walking upright before God. There will be no need for this cloak when disciples are liberated from bondage to the law of sin that dwells in their members, liberated in a manner analogous to how the ancient nation of Israel was liberated from physical bondage in Egypt. The Church as the Body of Christ, as the Body of the Son of Man, will be revealed (Luke 17:26–30) when the Tribulation begins. And as it was in the days of Noah when only seven pairs of clean or holy animals and a single pair of unclean animals entered the ark with the Eight, the majority of humanity will be taken unawares. They will not have practiced walking uprightly before God, and they will be consigned to death.

Today, disciples fight for righteousness in first their own lives, then in the lives of their brothers. They are their brothers' keepers. And this fight can be won; victory is assured if the person will spiritually crucify the person's former self. But crucifixion is a slow and exceedingly painful means of death. So is killing the old self, which has a strong desire to live. Killing the old self takes time and has an emotional cost. But if a person is not willing to lay down his or her physical life for the new life born from above that now also resides in the same tabernacle of flesh, that new life will be stillborn. In love, God the Father and Jesus His glorified Son will have this younger sibling thrown into the lake of fire.

If as a drawn and called disciple you wait for God to clean up you, if you will not begin to live as a Judean while still in a far country, then Jesus died in vain. There was no need for the Logos to come as a man and die on the cross for you.

Jesus died so that you, while still a son [or daughter] of disobedience, could be reconciled to God the Father. He died so that the Father could draw you from the world through His Holy Spirit. He died so that you, while hostile to God, could be born from above. Without spiritual birth, you would never leave the world; you would never begin living within the laws of God; you would never know that you need a Savior. So spiritual birth precedes answering an altar call, or *giving your heart to the Lord*. It precedes baptism. You are made holy when drawn from the world. It is now your obligation to live worthy of your drawing and calling.

Therefore, the Church today lacks any formal organization in this world. It is not in a position to collectively decide a manner. It doesn't exist nationally or internationally as it did in the middle of the 1st Century. Ministries cross national boundaries with hardly a glitch. So an offended brother who doesn't regularly share meals with the one causing the offense can continue not sharing meals without affecting in any way the one who has caused the offense. Shunning only works within the local community. It doesn't affect the one who never was a part of the community, or who only marginally interacted with the community.

Disciples, because of the development of denominations, are today in the same position as Daniel and his friends were in Babylon. They must either suffer the wrongs of a so-called brother, or they must use the civil authorities to rectify these wrongs. The greater Church, because of denominalization, while retaining the authority lacks the ability to shun a brother or to restore a shunned brother to fellowship. While disciples will judge angels in the future, they lost their ability to effect judgments in civil matters when the Church formally went into spiritual captivity in the 4th-Century. When the Church allowed Emperor Constantine to determine sound doctrine (ca. 325 CE), the Church was taken captive by the king of spiritual Babylon. And this captivity will not end until Babylon (i.e., the image Nebuchadnezzar saw) falls halfway through seven years of tribulation.

Needless to say, God retains the option to intervene in a matter between brothers. But this is an option He has been historically slow to exercise. Denominalization would never have developed if He were quick to employ His authority to rectify wrongs, and to heal breaches. Hence, an injured brother will either accept the injury—which should be done if possible—or this injured brother will need to petition civil authorities for redress. The endtime Church is not in a position to effectively intervene in disputes between self-identified Christians. The greater Church has developed into a bickering faction within the global *polis* identified as spiritual Babylon. And this faction has so little love for itself that it routinely teaches newly drawn and called disciples how to commit spiritual suicide by erasing the laws of God written on these tender hearts and minds.

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