

**INTRODUCTION:
WILL THE REAL CHURCH
PLEASE STAND UP?**



“**T**he emperor’s wearing no clothes!” said the young boy in Hans Christian Andersen’s tale *The Emperor’s New Clothes*. Two con artists fooled the emperor and his senior officials into believing that they had the means to produce the finest garments in the land. The cloth was so exquisite, they explained, that only the wise could see it. Such an amazing offer demanded a response, and respond they did. Why did the emperor part with so much cash? Why did the leaders of a community fall for this con? Why did the community itself accept the lie? Though the truth was obvious to all, the emperor believed a lie because he wanted it to be true; the officials, because they didn’t want to be seen as “blind”; the community, because their leaders proclaimed it as truth. It took a young boy to reveal the lie. “The emperor has no clothes.” Though a few people began to echo those words, the emperor and the national leaders did not allow the procession to end. Too much had been invested in it to accept that his expensive suit, all the hours of work, and all the checking and double checking by the finest minds in the land was nothing more than, well, nothing.

At the risk of “not being wise” I want to provoke Christians and Christian leaders to take a fresh look at the church. Like

the boy in this tale, I believe the Western church is naked. Are you willing to look with fresh eyes? If the church is in a fine position, then nothing I say can do her any damage. If, however, she is naked, then it is better to find out now than to discover it through divine judgement.

In Revelation, the church of Sardis “had a reputation for being alive,” but Jesus declared it to be a dead church. The Laodicean church called itself rich, but Jesus described this church as “wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” Pergamum and Thyatira were riddled with sexual immorality and accepted false teaching, while the church of Ephesus was described as having lost her first love, indifferent to Jesus like a wife and husband who share no real love (Rev. 2:1-3:21).

I did not just wake up one day and reach this conclusion. Quite the opposite, I was very much entrenched in this system. The change in my thinking has come over time. A cry for reality began for me about ten years ago, though the message is generational. By that I mean that each generation is led to the point of questioning and breaking free from the status quo. There can never be a “second-generation” church or Christian, only first-generation. To rest on the past is to fail the future, but to build on the past is to make a new future. The work of building, whether it is renovating or a completely new structure, begins with the foundation, and every builder must begin there. If a new builder comes onto an existing site, he cannot simply continue on with the existing structure; he must first inspect what has been built to ensure that it is structurally sound and can sustain the work to which he has been commissioned.

The idea of building on a sure foundation has strong roots in Scripture. Jesus said He would build His church upon the rock, while Paul speaks of himself as a master builder. A wise man builds on solid ground, and disciples are called to build each other up. Every generation that is called by God

is engaged with Jesus Christ in building His church through the Holy Spirit. It is imperative that this generation examine the foundations of the existing structure called church if it is going to birth a radical transformation of societies and nations. If this generation is going to usher in the return of Jesus Christ then the bride of Christ must be ready.

Many analogies can be given of the long-term problems associated with being slightly out of alignment. In navigation, being a few degrees out can have a significant effect over a long distance. During building a minor miscalculation can make the completed structure unsafe.

In calling for the real church to stand up, my goal is to compare the foundations of today's church with the biblical foundation established by Jesus. The apostle Paul is emphatic through much of his writings that there is only one foundation that is Christian--Jesus Christ crucified. Scripture demands, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith" (2 Cor. 13:5), and to be careful about how you build on that foundation of faith (1 Cor. 3:10).

After decades of "Christian superstars and faith heroes" crashing and burning as a result of sin, I became disillusioned. Not with God, not with Jesus or the message of the cross, but with the church. I looked around at what was and what had been in my experience of church, and in a moment of honesty that can only come from the Holy Spirit I said to the Lord, "This is not church. I don't know what is; I only know that this is not it."

From that point I embarked upon a quest to discover what it was that Jesus actually wanted to build when He said "I will build My church." My desire and passion was not to be successful, nor to be seen as successful, or to be the next "man of power for the hour," but to participate with Jesus Christ in building His church.

Some of what I write will be a problem for those with a "popular worldview" because identifying problems is

considered “negative” and therefore “destructive.” This is why I think God’s commission for Jeremiah is so appropriate. God said to Jeremiah:

Jer. 1:9-10 ...”Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.”

Before the “build and plant” comes the “uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow.” Quite simply, unless we are aware of the problem we will fail to appreciate the solution. For this reason I will begin with “My Story.” It is written for one reason, to show you the reader my personal position. Having been born into the home of a Pentecostal minister and growing up seeing the good, the bad, and the ugly associated with church, “My Story” plays an important part in this cry for the real church to be seen.

In part one I will compare and contrast the modern Western church with the church of Jesus Christ as Scripture reveals it to be. In part two I will discuss the process through which Jesus grows and matures His people as the church, and finally, in part three, I will discuss the strategy Jesus established for the people of God – the church – to rise up and advance with the kingdom.

I want to warn you from the outset that I have not tried to be politically correct in what I have written. By that I mean I have not presented what some would call a “balanced” view of the current state of the church in Western society. If we look at a fallen, sinful world we can see both good and bad. Even the meanest person, if we look hard enough, can be found to have some good point. When deciding if a structure should stay during a renovation it is usually decided not by seeing how much good is left in it but what decay has taken

place. Most builders would look for new or uncompromised material with which to build.

If we are to participate with Christ as His Spirit brings the next reformation, we have to be conscious of the devil's work to corrupt God's Word as he did with Adam and Eve. The sinful human nature that every leader has encountered (and possesses) is a need to self-justify. We do not take kindly to any form of criticism. This is most evident in counselling situations. A couple going through a marriage breakdown will usually justify their position whilst laying blame on the other. This began at the garden with Eve blaming the serpent for her sinful action, while Adam blamed Eve and God. This is foundational sin, the sin of self-justification, and everyone, including church leaders, is prone to it.

If there is a problem with our church system and I am a leader within this present church system, then I am a part of the problem. I can justify myself and the system in which I participate, or I can prayerfully seek the Spirit's revelation of my fault, repent, and change.

There is a common expression used as a rebuff to writers and preachers who endeavour to address problems in the church: "Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater." What we need to qualify is "what is the baby and what is the bathwater?" In my mind the baby is the people of God, the body of Christ, the church. The water is the beliefs, the methodology, the worldviews and attitudes that affect the movement of the church as a whole. So, although I know there is good in what we have and it has been useful to bring us to where we are today, my task is not to "find the good." My task in writing is to "tear down," in the manner of the Jeremiah commission, so that we can build and plant.

How will we know that the church is rising up if we fail to recognise what the church of Jesus looks like? This is a call to be the authentic church, not a counterfeit. If all we do is talk about what is bad we will still be no better

off; conversely, if all we do is praise the good we will never be pure. It is said that in the banking industry when teaching tellers to identify fake money they do not give them counterfeits to examine but rather make them so familiar with the genuine that recognising a fake becomes second nature. As we seek to understand and pursue the genuine fellowship and work of the church of Jesus Christ, we will come to recognise those teachings and actions that produce a counterfeit church. Then we can reject the church of men's imagination and participate in the authentic fellowship of Christ. A few years ago a number of people from Living Way Church came with me to a popular Christian conference that had been recommended to us. There were a number of things said at the conference that had no biblical foundation, and some of the teaching was offensive to the message of the cross. What I found exciting though was the response of those with me. I did not need to explain or "undo" what had been taught. They knew immediately that it was wrong and rejected it. It was rejected, not because they had been made aware of erroneous teaching, but because they understood the message of the cross.

I do not profess to have arrived but to have embarked upon a journey. Like the apostle Paul I want to obtain the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12-14). I also want to be able to present the churches I oversee "as a bride to one husband, to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2-4). I pray this book provokes a response in you. I hope that you will develop a greater passion for the message of the cross and be inspired to go for the prize by participating with Christ as He builds His church. I pray you will not see this as a "negative word" but as a passionate call for the church to rise up and be to the praise of God's glory (Eph. 1:12).

So, let's begin...