

THE TRUE ISRAEL AND THE CHURCH  
IN THE  
SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

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by  
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## INTRODUCTION

No one can deny objectively the fact of Christianity: about a billion of human beings who claim to be Christians are more than a sufficient proof of the reality of this religious phenomenon. Men of different ideological backgrounds and positions can state questions about the historicity of some accounts regarding the origins of Christianity and the interpretation of facts or doctrines, but the incontestable reality are twenty centuries of Christian history.

Nevertheless, what is Christianity? The first answer could be a Church, or even more, a Kingdom. But, what is the Church? What is the Kingdom? These questions have puzzled the theologians from the very beginning of the Christian era and, in spite of hundreds of books upon this subject, the final answers seem to be still beyond the horizon. There is an intensive search for identity, today more than ever, both among the Protestant churches and the Roman Catholicism, but the enigma still subsist.

This is a real problem, a problem of identity, of definition. In the words of a very well known contemporary theologian:

What is the Church? This question poses the unsolved problem of Protestantism. For the days of the Reformation to our own time, it has never been clear how the Church, in the sense of spiritual life and faith - the fellowship of Jesus Christ - is related to the institutions conventionally called churches. This problem has become sharper than ever as a result of the ecumenical movement...

For the Roman Catholic church this problem does not appear to exist at all. Rome presents to the world the face of a church which is certain of itself. But this is only so in appearance...<sup>1</sup>

Does the Church can be identified with some particular Protestant denomination or church? Is the Church constituted by a Synod of Bishops, or a Pope, or a group of Cardinals? What about the World Council of Churches, or some bigger ecclesiastical organization that could appear in the future? Is the Church as such still in the future? Could the Church be equated, in a symbolic or romantic sense, with the attractive idea of an "Omega point" or a "Christogenesis," as the final and glorious climax of a lengthy evolutive process?<sup>2</sup>

How and where can we get a satisfactory answer to this theological and existential riddle? This is really a bewildering question because there is not

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<sup>1</sup>Emil Brunner, The Misunderstanding of the Church. London: Lutterworth Press, trans. Harold Knight, 1952, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>"For millions of years nature had been preparing for the reception of grace. God had to become man in order to reincorporate in Himself the peak of evolution. Thus the goal of the cosmos and the goal of salvation are identical. From cosmogenesis came biogenesis, from biogenesis, neogenesis, and finally from neogenesis came Christogenesis, the crowning aim of all, as John and Paul saw it." Joseph V. Kopp, Theilhard de Chardin, a New Synthesis of Evolution. Glen Rock, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1966, p. 58.

room left for a half way or a possibility of compromise. The alternative that Jesus put to the Pharisees was dramatic, and the same confronts us today: "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters."<sup>3</sup>

This paper does not pretend to offer the final answer: to claim that after so many attempts to which the Christian era is a witness, would be an illusion. Nevertheless, it could represent a modest contribution toward the understanding of the nature of the Church through the statements of the Synoptic Gospels. Did the Church has a beginning or it is only the historic continuation of Israel, the people of God? Is there some ground for the identification of the Church as the "true Israel"? What the synoptists had to say about it? These questions envisage the scope of this paper, and the specific area with which it deals.

A word of explanation is convenient at this point: if it is true that the main interest of this paper is concentrate in which the synoptists understood and wrote about this subject, the author is convinced of the validity of the principle briefly enunciated by Jesus at Jerusalem, during the feast of the dedication: "the Scripture cannot be broken."<sup>4</sup> In other words, other biblical books will be used as well.

Note: The theme of the Kingdom will not be treated in this paper because its amplitude and the fact that there is not a total identity between it and the Church. "A common error is that of equating the kingdom of God with the church. There is a close relationship between the kingdom of God and the church, but they are not identical. Whereas the kingdom is the sovereignty of God, the church is the fellowship of persons made one people under the sovereignty."<sup>5</sup> "There is no tendency in the New Testament to identify the visible church with the Kingdom of God... The Church is indeed the people of the Kingdom of Christ, but the visible church is not that Kingdom."<sup>6</sup> "Neither is the church the Kingdom of God, even though it is part of the Kingdom, for the Kingdom is greater than any of its parts. Men become members of and participants in the Kingdom, when they become the church in its true meaning and purpose."<sup>7</sup>

#### A MATTER OF GENUINENESS

When the Gospels were written at least some of the Epistles of the New Testament were already in circulation among the Christian churches. This is not the place to start a discussion about precedences, but only to point out the existence and organization of the Church prior to the moment in which the Gospels were written. "The earliest Christian writer whose works are extant is the apostle

<sup>3</sup>Matt. 12:30. (R. S. V.)

<sup>4</sup>John 10:35. (K. J. V.)

<sup>5</sup>Frank Stagg, New Testament Theology. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1962, p. 151.

<sup>6</sup>John Bright, The Kingdom of God. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1953, p. 236.

<sup>7</sup>Ralph L. Knudsen, Theology in the New Testament. Valley Forge, Pa.: The Judson Press, 1961, pp. 321, 322.

Paul, and from him our investigation should begin."<sup>8</sup> And if this is so, what we can find in his writings about the nature, the identity of the Church?

From as early a stage as we can hope to reach (presupposed already by Paul) the primitive Christians were aware that they belonged to the new 'Israel of God,' which had emerged, as the prophets had always said it would, out of judgment and disaster. It was the true *ecclesia*, or people of God, by definition single and unique, one in all the earth.<sup>9</sup>

If then the whole episode of the beginnings of Christianity is to be understood, as the first Christians understood it, in the light of prophecy, what happened was that the existing Jewish community ceased to represent the true Israel of God, as the embodiment of His purposes for mankind, and its place was taken by the Christian *ecclesia*. The new community did not take this historical position because its members were wiser, more virtuous, or more capable than their Jewish contemporaries, but because they had been the object of an act of God. The crucial moment in the whole episode and its operative centre, was the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is in Him that what is essential in the prophecies of the true Israel (the servant of the Lord, the Son of Man) found fulfilment. In Him the whole Israel of God was incorporated. Its destiny was brought out in His experience. In Him the people of God was judged, died and rose to newness of life.<sup>10</sup>

Dodd is right: in the Epistles the identification of the Church as the "true Israel" is clearly stated time and again. The "Israel of God"<sup>11</sup> is contrasted with the "Israel after the flesh;"<sup>12</sup> not all the Israelites are really Israelites,<sup>13</sup> because many have only the name.<sup>14</sup> The "true Israel" is a people constituted by Jews and Gentiles,<sup>15</sup> who became one in Christ.<sup>16</sup> This is a mystery, unknown before, but known now through the *kerygma* of the apostles,<sup>17</sup> mainly the one of the apostle Paul sent to the Gentiles.<sup>18</sup>

In this theological understanding the three Synoptic Gospels were written. Did their authors understand the nature of the Church as the continuation of redemptive history? Did they record words and actions of Jesus in which the Church could be interpreted as the new Israel in process of formation or gathering? When and how the Church was founded?

There are four alternatives that have at least some support in the Synoptic Gospels, as the moment in which the Church emerged on the historic stage:

<sup>8</sup>C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Development*. London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1949, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup>C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953, p. 112.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 113.

<sup>11</sup>Gal. 6:16.

<sup>12</sup>1 Cor. 10:18.

<sup>13</sup>Rom. 9:6-8.

<sup>14</sup>Rom. 2:17-29.

<sup>15</sup>Eph. 2:1-22; Col. 1:20-23; Eph. 3:1-6.

<sup>16</sup>Eph. 3:6; 2:14; Gal. 3:26-29; Rom. 11.

<sup>17</sup>Eph. 3:1-6.

<sup>18</sup>Col. 1:23-29; Gal. 2:8.

calling of the first disciples "to be with him;"<sup>19</sup> with them Christ formed a wandering family,<sup>20</sup> a nucleus of future scribes of the kingdom of heaven;<sup>21</sup> they were the sheep of the "little flock."<sup>22</sup>

b) The confession of Peter, as speaking for the Twelve.<sup>23</sup> At Caesarea of Philippi he seemed to grasp for the first time, and by means of a special revelation, the messiahship of his Teacher; from there on Christ could speak to them about His coming sufferings; but it is quite evident that they didn't understand well what He said because when the crucial moment arrived Christ went alone to the death.

c) The Last Supper, when unmistakably a new covenant was established, a covenant which Jesus sealed with His own blood few hours later.<sup>24</sup>

d) The reunion of the disciples in the Resurrection faith, either during the forty days in which the risen Saviour was with them, or at the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.<sup>25</sup>

In the practice, nevertheless, it is possible to make a combination of all these four alternatives, with special emphasis upon the first and the fourth ones. So, it is evident that Jesus acted with a plan and an aim in mind: for this reason he chose the twelve disciples; after the acknowledgment of Peter He spoke about the foundation of His Church as still in the future, and with this small original core of followers, as the representatives of that future Church, he made a covenant which was ratified with His death on the cross and His resurrection. And, finally, with the extraordinary and powerful multifarious gift of the Spirit, the Church was endowed to start its life as a community of believers with the tremendous task of the proclamation of the good news to all the world.

In the interpretation of these facts there are two key passages, the only ones in the Gospels in which the noun "church" is founded, Matt. 16:18 and 18:17. They stated clearly His intention to organize a society, a permanent society against which nothing could do the doors of the grave; this society called "church", would have a twofold nature: an invisible one ("where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them"<sup>26</sup>) and a visible one, with the faculty to discipline its members. Matt. 16:18 is reference to the invisible Church, while Matt. 18:17 is the Magna Charta of the visible Church.

Both loci are exclusive of Matthew,<sup>27</sup> and this is one of the reasons of the storm of theological controversy that roars around them, separating drastically the commentators. Let us consider for a moment the basis of this discussion and the positions of some representative authors about it. In the words of Emil Brunner: "Whether with the older school of critical scholarship we deny the genuineness or whether with the more recent and no less critical school we affirm it..."<sup>28</sup>

Matt. 16:17-19 is the locus classicus to prove the establishment of the Church by Jesus. For centuries this passage was considered as the cornerstone of the theological foundation of the Church, but the things began to change since the last century. H. J. Holtzmann was the first to deny its authenticity, holding

<sup>19</sup>Mark 3:14.

<sup>20</sup>Matt. 8:18-22.

<sup>21</sup>Matt. 13:52.

<sup>22</sup>Matt. 26:31; Luke 12:32

<sup>23</sup>Matt. 18:20.

<sup>24</sup>Matt. 16:18; 18:17.

<sup>25</sup>Emil Brunner, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>23</sup>Matt. 16:13-23; Mark 8:22-33; Luke 9:18-22.

<sup>24</sup>Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20.

<sup>25</sup>Matt. 28:11-20; Mark 16:9-20 (the "longer ending"); Luke 24:13-53; Acts 1 and 2.

the position that Jesus could not speak with this assurance about his future; to Holtzmann this statement was elaborated by the early Church after its separation from Judaism. Adolf Harnack regarded these verses as an interpolation made during the reign of Hadrian (A. D. 138),<sup>29</sup>

More recently, Rudolf Bultmann also raised his pen against the authenticity of this passage:

In the saying Matt. 16:18f. placed upon the lips of Jesus by the Church, Jesus' band of disciples is called the "Church" (Congregation) whose leader possesses the keys of the kingdom of Heaven.<sup>30</sup>

As time went on and membership increase, life within the congregation naturally needed a certain regulation which could not be left to the council of elders to decide from case to case; but the sources barely permit us a glimpse of that. Matt. 16:19 and 18:18 testify that the authority "to bind and to loose," i. e. a disciplinary power, lay first in the hands of Peter, then in those of the Congregation - and that probably means, in the hands of the elders; and Matt. 18:15-17 gives rules for settling quarrels in the congregation.<sup>31</sup>

The same idea, i. e. that these two passages were the work of the early Church, is held by E. G. Wright and Reginald H. Fuller: "... for Matthew 16:18, if not an authentic saying of Jesus, emanates from the earliest community."<sup>32</sup> These two authors also opined that the praise of Jesus to Peter does not correspond with the historical reality, but is posterior accretion.<sup>33</sup>

Vincent Taylor, commenting the position of Bultmann, sees these verses as the results of some debates within the Palestinian community,<sup>34</sup> but his own position is a little ambiguous when he says:

It may be, as many suppose, that the words addressed to Peter in Matt. 16:18ff. have been influenced by controversies between parties in the Infant Church... It is, however, idle to deny that there are sayings about which we are compelled to hesitate. Personally, I do not think that there are many sayings of this kind, and I have no hesitation in claiming that the tradition of the words of Jesus is far better preserved than that we have any right to expect, and with greater accuracy that is to be found in the record of the words of any great teacher of the past.<sup>35</sup>

Among many others it can be mentioned also Hans Conzelmann; to him, the "foundation" of the Church happened after the Resurrection: "Of course, the career and teaching of Jesus is the presupposition for the origin of the church. But Jesus did not found a church. It was assembled as a community through the appearances

<sup>29</sup>Vide Ralph E. Knudsen, Theology in the New Testament. Valley Forge, Pa.: The Judson Press, 1964, p. 328.

<sup>30</sup>Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 1955, vol. 1, p. 37.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., vol. 1, p. 61.

<sup>32</sup>G. E. Wright and R. H. Fuller, The Book of the Acts of God. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1957, p. 268.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>34</sup>Vincent Taylor, The Formation of the Gospel Tradition. London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1945, p. 106.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 112, 113.

of the Son One and the preaching of the witnesses to the these appearances.<sup>36</sup> He adds: "This assertion does, of course, contradict a famous passage, Matt. 16:18, 19... But is this a genuine saying of Jesus?"<sup>37</sup> After discussing at length several hypotheses, Conzelmann concludes with "the recognition that here is no authentic saying of Jesus..."<sup>38</sup>

G. D. Kilpatrick sees in these passages another proof of the liturgical purpose of the Matthew's Gospel,<sup>39</sup> while Krister Stendahl attributes them to Matthew, as a recourse to impress the meaning of the Church upon his students in his school for Church's leaders.<sup>40</sup> And so, the list of the opposed opinions could grow more and more.

On the other side of the dispute there are also noted authors for whom these verses are authentic logia Iesus. Donald Guthrie, after recognizing that Matthew is the only Gospel with a specific teaching about the Church, states:

... many scholars have disputed the originality of these sayings and suggested that they arose in the ecclesiastical environment of the early communities. Yet there is no strong ground for such an assumption. There is on the other hand an absence of any other explanation of the universal acceptance of the term in the primitive Church.<sup>41</sup>

Oscar Cullmann shared the same opinion when he wrote: "from this insight light falls upon the saying concerning the Church in Matt. 16:18, there is no longer any substantial reason to deny its genuineness..."<sup>42</sup> The same position is also held by F. C. Grant,<sup>43</sup> Ned B. Stonehouse,<sup>44</sup> and others. Frank Stagg makes a kind of synthesis in these words:

The most difficult passage on the ekklesia is Matthew 16:18... The genuineness of the verse itself as a saying of Jesus as long been contested. Many critical scholars today, however, are convinced of its genuineness. It has already been shown that the idea of the ekklesia is present in the four Gospels, set forth under various terms. The absence of Synoptic parallels is not in itself sufficient reason for the rejection of a passage. Schmidt very plausibly argues that the presence of Johannine and Pauline circles in the early church makes it difficult to see how this passage, with its special reference to Peter, could have been introduced unless it actually represents something that Jesus said. The passage is in Matthew and must be reckoned with as it stands.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Hans Conzelmann, An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament. New York: Harper and Row Pub., trans. John Bowden, 1969, p. 32.

<sup>37</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>38</sup>Conzelmann, Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>39</sup>G. D. Kilpatrick, The Origins of the Gospel According to St. Matthew. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946, p. 59.

<sup>40</sup>Donald B. Guthrie, The Gospels and Acts. New Testament Introduction. Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1965, p. 25.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 21, 22.

<sup>42</sup>Oscar Cullmann, Christ and Time. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, trans. Floyd V. Filson, 1956, p. 112.

<sup>43</sup>F. C. Grant, An Introduction to the New Testament Thought. Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950, p. 270.

<sup>44</sup>Ned B. Stonehouse, The Witness of Matthew and Mark to Christ. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1950, p. 235.

<sup>45</sup>Frank Stagg, op. cit., pp. 185, 186.

Taking a positive stand in relation to the authenticity of these verses, as the author of this paper does, it raises another very disquieting question: Why are there only two passages in the four Gospels in which the Church is mentioned? If the creation of the Church was a definite design of Jesus one could expect to find dozens of statements about it, but the scarcity calls the attention. Nevertheless, the shortage of references to the Church is more apparent than real.

The absence of the term "church" from the Gospels, except in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17, is to some extent explained in the occurrence of many alternate terms used to describe the people of God. The contemplation of a divinely called and created people is reflected in the ideas of his "flock", the Son of man, the true vine, and the new family. The idea of a new Israel, explicitly in the Epistles, is implicit in the Gospels. In their very nature the preaching and teaching of Jesus contemplate a special people. What we know almost exclusively as the "church", the New Testament knows by many terms.<sup>46</sup>

Among these different even synonyms terms the New Testament uses flock, Israel of God, elect race, royal priesthood, holy nation, God's own people, temple of God, seed of Abraham, etc.<sup>47</sup> but undoubtedly the three more important are ekklesia, the body of Christ and koinonia: the ekklesia of God, the body of Christ and the koinonia of the Spirit, "these three almost fall into a trinitarian formulation in the New Testament, but the patterns do not always hold."<sup>48</sup>

# IN SEARCH OF A NAME

Focusing now the noun ekklesia, we have already affirmed the genuineness of those sayings recorded by Matthew (16:18; 18:17), but what word did Christ employ? This can be discussed at length, and some will point to Hebrew, while others will argue in favor of the Aramaic or the Greek as the etymological root behind the thought conveyed by the Greek term ekklesia. The problem, nevertheless, is not so hard to solve if we remember that the same term was already used in the Septuagint, and it was a familiar one to the Jews as a designation for the people of God, Israel. Among the possible reasons for its generalized use the following ones can be mentioned:

- (1) The disciples of the risen Christ believed themselves to be the true people of God; they were the Messianic community... in Greek, apart from sunagoge, which had definite limitations, ... ekklesia was the only word capable of receiving the content of the Christian claim. (2) It was not so distinctively Jewish as to be unsuitable for a society which quickly accepted Gentiles to membership on the profession of their faith in Christ the Lord.

<sup>46</sup>Stagg, op. cit., p. 172.  
<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 170.  
<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 179.

(3) In particular, ekklesia had scriptural authority and was familiar to all.<sup>49</sup>

Other names, usually more concrete, were used, but gradually this one ousted all others and became the exclusive possession of the Christians. This result owed much to the frequency of Paul's use of ekklesia and to his prominent conception of what the Ecclesia is.<sup>50</sup>

Let us consider briefly the process for which this Greek noun became the almost exclusive for the designation of the God's people. The immediate antecedents are two Hebrew words quite common in the Old Testament: qahal and edah. The first one, qahal had different meanings: a meeting with or without religious purpose,<sup>51</sup> a gathering together of all the tribes or of each one in particular,<sup>52</sup> and the people assembled in the Sanhedrin.<sup>53</sup> The second, edah was used to designate a band or company in a non religious sense as of animals,<sup>54</sup> gods,<sup>55</sup> people,<sup>56</sup> all the congregation of Israel, the people of God,<sup>57</sup> and a local congregation.<sup>58</sup>

Summarizing a long etymological history, it can be said that before the Exile, edah designated the people of God, gather together or not, while qahal was used only for the God's people in assembly or convocation. After the returning of the captives from Mesopotamia, the two terms became synonyms. Something similar happened with the two equivalents Greek nouns used by the translator of the Septuagint: ekklesia and synagoge. At the time of Christ, synagoge came to describe only the local Jewish congregation, while ekklesia was used for the people of God as a whole.

The term ekklesia was widely used in the Greek-speaking world of the first century, but it is a mistake to seek the New Testament meaning in pagan Greek usage. The term is based upon a root meaning "to call" and ekklesia was used in Greek cities to designate town assemblies. The primary background to New Testament usage, however, is the Old Testament. The doctrine of calling and election is basic in the Bible, and the ekklesia is made up of "called saints", but this is not what is stressed in the term "the ekklesia of God."

Likewise, the emphasis is not upon local assembly. To argue for this is to be true to etymology and to pagan Greek usage, but it is not to approach the study through biblical usage. The idea of local assembly is not ruled out, and sometimes it is affirmed; but local assembly does not belong to the essence of the New Testament idea. The ekklesia of God refers to God's own people. Ownership, not local assembly, is the emphasis. Those people,

<sup>49</sup>George Johnston, The Doctrine of the Church in the New Testament. Cambridge: University Press, 1943, pp. 43, 44.

<sup>50</sup>Loc. cit.

<sup>51</sup>Deut. 5:22.

<sup>52</sup>Madecrite Fragment XIV: 3,6.

<sup>53</sup>San. 4:4.

<sup>54</sup>Gal. 6:30

<sup>55</sup>Gal. 8:21.

<sup>56</sup>Gal. 7:7.

<sup>57</sup>Gal. 7:4:2

<sup>58</sup>San. 1:6.

not where or whether assembled, is the New Testament. This can be demonstrated only by showing how the pertinent Hebrew words were translated into Greek.<sup>59</sup>

So, whatsoever had been the language in which Jesus uttered these sayings, Matthew, guided by the usage imposed by the Septuagint, had no problem to transmit the thought of the Lord, because ekklesia "indicates the parallelism between the church and the people of God on Sinai" and "in the church the hope for the gathering together of Israel has been fulfilled,"<sup>60</sup> and many times Jesus made reference to his purpose to gather together His people in His kingdom, both present and eschatological.

#### THROUGH THE WAY OF SYMBOLISM

The altogether significant movement of thought during the past century amongst both Catholic and Protestant theologians has been that which has made its concern the setting forth of the nature of the relationship between the historical experience of the Old Israel and the New.<sup>61</sup>

Many books have been written upon the subject and, with the exception of small details, there is a rare agreement among the Christian theologians about the continuity of Israel in the new Israel as the people of God. As it has been said above, the Epistles and the Revelation give an overwhelming support to this interpretation.

But this matter of identity is also seen in the symbolism and eschatological meaning of some of the actions and sayings of Jesus. As some examples among many that could be mentioned, the commentators point out the number of disciples in its relation to the number of the tribes,<sup>62</sup> the very explicit declaration about the work of judgment which would be done by the apostles,<sup>63</sup> the heritage of the kingdom of heaven for people from the four corners of the earth in the same right as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,<sup>64</sup> the prophetic utterances about the doom upon Jerusalem implying a rejection of the people of Israel but not a failure of the God's plans,<sup>65</sup> the new covenant in occasion of the Last Supper,<sup>66</sup> etc.

A separate paragraph is deserved by the Exodus or new Exodus motif, which has been interpreted as a clear indication of the intention of Jesus to create a new Israel. The author of this paper thinks that the parallelism has been pushed too far in some of the instances, reading more than which is said in the New Testament. The following ones are some of the symbolic features that has been seen in the ministry of Jesus:

a) As Joseph, the son of Jacob, was known by his dreams and eventually took his family to Egypt, so Joseph, the father of Jesus, had dreams, and also went with his family to the same country. And, as Israel left

<sup>59</sup>Stagg, op. cit., p. 172.

<sup>60</sup>Conzelmann, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>61</sup>R. W. Dillinston, The Word of God and the People of God, p. 41. In Knudsen, op. cit., pp. 331, 332.

<sup>62</sup>Mark 3:14; cf. Rev. 21:12-14.

<sup>63</sup>Matt. 19:28; this saying is not registered in the parallel passages of Mark 10:28-31 and Luke 18:28-30, but appears in a different context: Luke 22:28-30.

Egypt, obeying an order of God, the same happened with Jesus (Hosea 11:1).

b) The appearance of John the Baptist in the desert could be considered as the calling to go back to the time of the youthfulness of Israel, the time of the close communion with God, because the desert seems to be a symbol of that experience (Hosea 2:14-16).

c) Jesus, as the symbol and the incarnation of the new Israel, passed through the experience of the "sea" (the baptism in the Jordan) and went out to the desert of the temptation for forty days, as the people of Israel spent forty years in the wilderness.

d) Jesus, as the new Moses, a Moses redivivus, the Prophet (Deut. 18:15) from a mountain gave a new Torah, or more accurately, gave a new meaning to the old Torah. After the Sermon on the Mountain, Matthew recorded ten miracles of Jesus (Matt. 8 and 9) like the ten miraculous wonders that Moses performed in Egypt.

e) As Moses wrote the Pentateuch, so Matthew arranged the material of his Gospel in five books or major divisions. (Others see six divisions as corresponding to the Pentateuch and Joshua.)

f) Mark recorded thirteen acts of healing, and these would correspond one for each tribe, and the 13th. to the "nations" or the Gentiles.

g) The transfiguration of Jesus has its counterpart in the light that beamed from the face of Moses when he descended from the Sinai.

h) The two groups that Jesus sent during his ministry anticipating the missionary enterprise, the twelve and the seventy, are the equivalent of the twelve spies and the seventy elders; and the same numerical symbolism is seen in the five and the seven loaves with which, in two different opportunities, Jesus fed miraculously the multitude: they are the symbol of the twelve tribes; and again, the remainings of one of these feedings were gathered in twelve baskets.

i) The strange itinerary of Jesus in Galilee (Mark 7 and 8), which seems to have no a definite plan or design, could be a symbol of the forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

These are only a few examples of the so called Exodus motif; they can multiplied as the imagination permits it, but many of the equivalences do not seem to be sufficient sound. As a partial summary of a lengthy and complet study about this subject in the Synoptic Gospels, George L. Balentine wrote some years ago:

It is evident from the Matthean and Lukan additions to Mark's parallelism with the Exodus that each of the Evangelist was conscious of Mark's purpose and plan, for each has incorporate a vast amount of material peculiar to himself either in arrangement or in source but which underscore and heighten the Exodus parallelism in Mark. Both Evangelists, like Mark,

<sup>64</sup>Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28-30.

<sup>65</sup>Matt. 23:32-39; Luke 11:49-51; 13:34,35, and in the apocalyptic chapters: Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21.

<sup>66</sup>Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20; cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-29.

were greatly influenced and controlled by primitive Christology of the Early Church; namely, that Jesus was the Prophet like Moses of Deuteronomy 18:15.<sup>67</sup>

# A MORE SURE WORD OF PROPHECY<sup>68</sup>

In the Markan record Jesus began His kerygma with a puzzling announcement: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel."<sup>69</sup> What time? Again, near the closing of His ministry Christ spoke of the same kairos: "My time is at hand,"<sup>70</sup> "I am the Christ; and the time draweth near."<sup>71</sup> (John 7:8 contains another reference to the "time", not recorded in the other three Gospels.)

There are several other references to this special time in the New Testament, both in the form of a specific period (kairos) or the less definite chronos. About this last one there is a very striking biblical statement from Paul: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law."<sup>72</sup>

All these enigmatic expressions must have some connection with a specific time in the plans of God for a special work to be done. Going back to the Old Testament there are many declarations about that work of the Messiah, but the only one referred to the time in which He would appear is found in Daniel 9:24-27: after the Exile God would give to Israel a last time of opportunity for the fulfillment of its mission to be light of the peoples and to proclaim on earth the plan of salvation. This time is depicted under the prophetic number of 70 weeks of years, or 70 x 7 = 490 years; at the end of that lapse a sixfold work would be accomplished: "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon the holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy."<sup>73</sup>

The interpretation of the meaning of this period and its divisions and subdivisions ( 7, 62 and 1 weeks; and this last one divided in two halves) has a great support in dozens of biblical exegetes. The Synoptists recorded several instances in which directly or indirectly Jesus made reference to the prophecies of Daniel:

a) Mark 1:15, and its reference to a definite time in relation to the Messiah and his work. Cf. Dan. 9:24-27.

b) Matt. 24:15: "When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whose readeth,<sup>74</sup> let him understand)..." ("and when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh..." Luke 21:20), is a clear reference to Dan. 9:27, and other expressions in Dan. chapter 11.

<sup>67</sup>George L. Balentine, The Concept of the New Exodus in the Gospels. Unpublished dissertation. Louisville, 1961, pp. 344, 345.

<sup>68</sup> 2 Pet. 1:19. (K. J. V.)

<sup>69</sup> Mark 1:15.

<sup>70</sup> Matt. 26:18.

<sup>71</sup> Luke 21:8.

<sup>72</sup> Gal. 4:4.

<sup>73</sup> Dan. 9:24.

<sup>74</sup> Emphasis mine.

c) Matt. 24:21: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be," ("For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be", Mark 13:19) is almost a verbatim quotation from Dan. 12:1.

d) Matt. 24:30, Mark 13:26, Luke 21:27 (Matt. 26:64, Mark 14:62) contain references to the coming of the Son of man, taken from Dan. 7:13,14.

e) Matt. 13:43: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their father..." is a paraphrase of Dan. 12:3.

These biblical references to Daniel are complemented by several other found in the New Testament, mainly in the Revelation. (In spite of many of the so called "evidences" on the contrary, the author of this paper accepts the authenticity of this book, so attacked from the time of Porphyry on; this is the reason why he is dealing with this prophetic period as a foretold time of opportunity for Israel before the emergency of the new Israel.)

Among the Church's Fathers, and without the pretension to present here a detailed history of prophetic interpretation, there were many who applied the "seventy weeks of years" to the first coming of Christ. Only as examples we can mention the names of Tertullian (who applied this period from the first year of Darius the Great until the destruction of Jerusalem)<sup>75</sup> Clement of Alexandria (from the reconstruction of the Temple until the time of Christ),<sup>76</sup> Hippolytus of Porto Romanus (from the first year of Darius until the birth of Christ, but he arbitrarily separated the last "week" from the previous 69 introducing a gap in between),<sup>77</sup> Julius Africanus (from the 20th. year of Artaxerxes I until the time of Christ, or from B.C. 444 to A. D. 31)<sup>78</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea (from Persia until the time of Christ, but he also as Hippolytus introduced a gap),<sup>79</sup> and Athanasius.<sup>80</sup> From the time of the council of Nicaea the names of biblical expositors that held the same interpretation could be multiplied many times until the present.

The beginning of this period of 490 years is dated "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem..."<sup>81</sup> It is true that there were four different decrees, issued by Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes I, but the only one that met the prophetic conditions was the one that Artaxerxes I signed in the 7th. year of his rulership, because it gave authority to the Jewish state in the Persian state for the first time.<sup>82</sup> Thank to recent archaeological discoveries

<sup>75</sup>Tertullian, An Answer to the Jews, chaps. 8, 11. (ANF, vol. 3, pp.158-168.)

<sup>76</sup>Clement of Alexandria, The Stromata, book 1, chap. 21. (ANF, vol. 2, p. 329.)

<sup>77</sup>Hippolytus, Fragments on Commentaries, "On Daniel", frag. 2, chaps. 10-16. (ANF, vol. 5, pp. 180, 181.)

<sup>78</sup>Julius Africanus, The Extant Fragments of the Five Books of the Chronography of Julius Africanus, fragments 16, 18. (ANF, vol. 6, pp. 134-137.)

<sup>79</sup>Eusebius, The Proof of the Gospel, book 8, chap. 2. (Trans. W. J. Ferrar, vol. 2, p. 118.)

<sup>80</sup>Athanasius, On the Incarnation of the Word, sec. 39. (NPNF, 2nd. series, vol. 4, p. 57.)

<sup>81</sup>Dan. 9:25.

<sup>82</sup>Ezra 7.

in or and Elephantine Island, some chronological details had been ascertained, and today we know exactly the chronology of the Persian monarchs. Artabanus ascended the throne between B. C. December 17, 465 and B. C. January 2, 464; in consequence he issued the mentioned edict in the fall of B. C. 457. Adding to this date the 490 years of "second" opportunity for Israel, we reach the year ... B. C. 83

It is not possible according to the biblical data that we have, to find a definite event in that year, but it would be not to push too far the matter if this end is related to the stoning of Stephen and the beginning of the mission to the Gentiles, as a result of the persecution launched by the Jews against the Christians; the conversion of Paul also seems to have some close relation with the death of Stephen.<sup>84</sup> This event determined a major caesura in the relation of the dawning church with Judaism; the early community was dispersed, and when a group was formed in Antioch of Syria, its components began to apply to themselves the appellation of "Christians."<sup>85</sup>

In the application of testimonia from the Old Testament, it is a fundamental postulate that the Church is the true, and ultimate, people of God, the heir of the divinely-guided history of Israel, which emerged out of the crisis in which God visited his people in judgment and redemption. Out of this conviction arose the whole Christian doctrine of the Church.<sup>86</sup>

A prophetic period or dispensation was close then, but only to open a new one, in which the Jews as individuals would have the same opportunity to salvation as every human being, because the Israel of God, the true Israel, is formed both by Jews and no Jews, made one people in Christ.<sup>87</sup> The failure of the Jewish nation was not a failure of God: His purposes are immutable, and through His "people", made a channel of His grace, the salvation is offered to all the earth. Israel as a nation was rejected<sup>88</sup> because didn't fulfill the purpose of its calling, and deliberately renounced to the theocracy when through its representatives solemnly said: "We have no king but Caesar."<sup>89</sup> With the utterance of these words the covenant with Israel as a nation was definitively broken. But a new covenant was already celebrated, also with a group of Jews, which few hours later was ratified by the death of the Lord of the covenant, Jesus Christ.

## CONCLUSION

The Church is the true, the new Israel; there is no room for doubt in the pages of the New Testament. But what church is the Church? With this very important question we are touching a highly sensitive and painful point. Why? Because

<sup>83</sup> Megfried H. Horn and Lynn H. Wood, The Chronology of Ezra 7. Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1953, 160 pp.

<sup>84</sup> Acts 7:58; 8:1; 9:1-22.

<sup>85</sup> Acts 11:26.

<sup>86</sup> C. H. Dodd, According to the Scriptures, p. 111.

<sup>87</sup> Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 3:1-6.

<sup>88</sup> Matt. 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18.

<sup>89</sup> John 19:15.

the divisions of Christianity and the claims of specially one of its branches, there is almost impossible to speak objectively upon this subject.

Unfortunately, the claims which the Roman Church arrogates to itself make it exceedingly difficult for anyone to study objectively the statement of Jesus: "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my ekklesia" (Matt. 16:18). The Roman claims are so flagrantly abusive of the New Testament teaching and of early Christian history that it is almost incredible that anyone should find them credible.<sup>90</sup>

These are the strong words of Frank Stagg, but he does not offer a solution to the problem. What about the claims of other churches and denominations? What about the ones of the World Council of Churches? Will the Church emerge upon the premises of the so called "social gospel" when then will be applied in an universal scale? But these are not the only questions: Who will determine that some church or organization of churches has become the Church? Will be it through the decision of its components? Beware of that pretension! The Jews also said arrogantly: "We have Abraham to our father,"<sup>91</sup> and it was just a few months before their rejection as the chosen people.

It is necessary something superior to opinions or feelings: an objective standard of evaluation to judge the character of every religious group which claim to be the Church. And God gave man that norm: His word, the Bible. In the Bible there are mentioned some characteristics that could be used as a norm of measurement:

Here is the patience of the saints; here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.<sup>92</sup>

And the dragon was wroth with the women, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.<sup>93</sup>

... for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.<sup>94</sup>

The time will come when the Head of the Church, the Bridegroom, will return for the wedding and then, as the Bible said, it will be one church, the Church, "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing... it should be holy and without blemish."<sup>95</sup>

This is the goal, attainable through the grace of God. Every church that arrives to this goal and meets the biblical requirements is the Church, the new and true Israel of God.

A further step will be convenient at this point: the churches are not self-existent beings; they are formed by individuals. How can an individual become a true Israelite? Only through the experience which transformed Jacob, a deceiver, in Israel, a prince or victor. Every Christian, to be really so, needs the same experience that Jacob had by the Jabbok: his name was changed because, it was said to him, "you have striven with God and with men, and had

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<sup>90</sup>Stagg, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

<sup>91</sup>Matt. 3:8.

<sup>92</sup>Rev. 14:12.

<sup>93</sup>Rev. 12:17.

<sup>94</sup>Rev. 19:10.

<sup>95</sup>Eph. 5:27.

prevailed."<sup>96</sup> After a long life, of approximately one century, of deceiving and scheming, he finally came to the point in which God would bless him. His victory resided in his total surrendering to God. And this is the only way to become an Israelite, as always was. To be of Israel, in the real sense, has nothing to do with a physical descent, but with a confession of faith, a close spiritual union with Christ, "for apart from me you can do nothing."<sup>97</sup>

The apostle and prophet envisaged the final reunion of the true Israel, already foretold by Moses,<sup>98</sup> when in exalted tones he wrote about the gathering together of the symbolic 144,000:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Gen. 32:28. (R.S.V.)

<sup>97</sup>John 15:5. (R.S.V.)

<sup>98</sup>Deut. 30:1-5.

<sup>99</sup>Rev. 7:9-12. (R.S.V.)

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