

*The Myth of*

## The "CHURCH" of the Bible

The English word "church" should **not** be in the New Testament (NT) Scriptures at all! That is why it is put in quotation marks in the title. That English word is **not** a translation of the Greek word "ekklesia" Modern use of the word "church" almost always has reference to (1) a religious institution or organization, or (2) to a material building called a "church." That was not the meaning of the common Greek word "ekklesia" in the time the Scriptures were written.

In the day of Christ and His apostles, the word "ekklesia" was an everyday word that simply meant "assembly," "congregation," or "gathering" of people. Any gathering of people, whether religious, political, or even criminal in purpose, was called an "ekklesia." The word itself gives no indication of the **kind** or the **purpose** of the assembly (ekklesia). In Acts 19:32, 41, ekklesia is translated "assembly" and refers to an unlawful gathering, a mob. In the same context it has reference to a "lawful **assembly**" in Acts 19:39. The word ekklesia appears more than 100 times in the Greek NT Scriptures, **but only in these three instances in Acts 19 is the word actually translated!** Isn't that incredible? Why? If the Greek word "ekklesia" really means the same thing as the English word "church," why did not the translators render it "church" in these three cases?

There is a reason why the word "church" is **substituted** for a translation of ekklesia, but it is without any justification whatever. To put it simply, the word "church" appears in the King James Version (KJV) because King James **ordered** it there. He demanded that the word ekklesia **not** be translated by the word "congregation" or "assembly!" Thus the translators were forbidden to render the true meaning of the word, except in the three above instances and were required by the King to substitute the word "church." In fact, Rule 3 of the "Rules to be observed in the Translation of the Bible" specifically says: "The old Ecclesiastical words [were] to be kept, viz. the word **church** not to be translated **congregation**, etc." The translators obeyed the King and that version is rightly called the King James Version! The English word "church" does **not** belong in the Scriptures!

Hopefully you can now understand the reason for the heading of this article: The **myth** of the "church" of the Bible. The Lord does not have a **Church!** In the February 1987 **Examiner** Dusty Owens dealt extensively with this subject under the heading: "**CHURCH: From God or Man?**" Read and study it.

In all instances where the word "ekklesia" appeared, if it was in a religious connection or had to do with the Lord's people, the word "church" was substituted. Hence, in Acts 19 the three times the word appears it has no reference to the Lord's disciples and the word "assembly" is given as a true translation. This egregious error of substituting the word "church" rather than providing a proper translation has been a source of untold problems giving apparent justification for the institutional church as we know it today, from the Roman Catholic **Church**, Lutheran **Church**, Presbyterian **Church**, Baptist **Church**, **Church** of God, **Church** of England, and such like on down to the **Church** of Christ and the Christian **Church**. These are all religious institutions/organizations or **churches**, something foreign to the divine record. The "**Assemblies** of God" is a far more scriptural name than any of the above.

Now you can see how the religious institution called a "**church**" seems to be justified in the Scriptures. Certainly you can read about the **church** and **churches** in the Scriptures. But in reality there is no such thing as "the **church**" in God's word. Jesus did not build a **church** institution! He did not purchase a **church** organization with His blood. He is not the Head over all things to a **church**.

Jesus does indeed build His **assembly**, His people, upon the rock (Matt. 16:18) He certainly did purchase the **assembly** - the redeemed - with His blood (Acts 20:28). He is definitely the Head over all things to His **congregation** of people (Eph. 1:18, 23). There is as much in the Scriptures about a Roman Catholic Church (institution) as there is about a Church of Christ (institution) or even an Independent Christian Church (institution), local or universal! Absolutely nothing is said about any church organization!

## We Live In a Church World

Millions belong to a **church** organization of one brand or another; and they love their **church**. They support their **church**. They want to be faithful to their **church**. They resent anyone who speaks against their **church**. To most of them "one **church** is as good as another," but each one likes his **church** best. They are right about it - one **church** is as good as any other **church**; one **church** is as acceptable to the Lord as any other. None of the **churches** originated from Him and not a one of them comes as a result of obeying the Lord!

The idea of the institutional **church** is well established in the mind of most **church** people. Nearly everyone believes the **church** is from the Lord. It would greatly shock most **church** members to hear anyone even raise a question about there being no **church** in the Scriptures. Any opposition to the **church** would be repudiated outright before and without any serious consideration of the matter. **Church** people

are very secure in their belief in and acceptance of the **church**. Just look at all the **churches** in the world. Look at the multiplied millions who belong to a **church** and there is a great variety of them. They trust and hope in their **church**. It is vital in their lives even if many of them have a very casual relationship with the **church** of their choice.

Now comes someone trying to tell us that there is no **church** in the Bible! He is a fanatic, a heretic worthy of being burned at the stake. The reaction to the "no **church** in the Scripture" idea is always strong, usually violent. But the truth still remains even if **church** adherents refuse to honestly and seriously consider the matter. There is no **church** in the Scripture. The **church** institution concept was born in the apostasy that led to the oldest and greatest ecclesiastical organization of all, the Roman Catholic **Church**. It is the "mother" of all institutional **churches**.

**Remember:** The word **Church** appears in your Bible **only** because of the decree of King James of England. That is a fact that cannot be successfully disputed. After all, he was the head of the **Church** of England.

### **An Interesting Question:**

But someone says, "If what you say is true, then why do all the later translations have the word 'church' in them? Why didn't the other translators correct the error?" That is a fair question. Let me give some reasons why that word has been retained in most translations since them. Perhaps if **you** stopped to think about it seriously you could come up with a few motivating reasons on your own.

Though not **all** translations use the word "**church**" the primacy of the KJV has cemented that word into religious thought. The KJV has had greater circulation among English speaking people than any other version before or since. It is called the "common version" and it found its way to the people throughout the world, made possible by the invention of the printing press. It was the translation officially "Appointed to be read in Churches." It did not take long before it was established as **the** translation for English speaking people, even though there was considerable opposition to it. It had some very worthy critics who saw it as flawed and slanted, which it really was and still is.

The style is one of its greatest appeals. Written in the stately and beautiful Elizabethan language, it is perhaps the easiest of all translations to commit to memory. It came to be regarded as the one and only true translation, even venerated as sacred. To speak critically of "the blessed KJV" is close to the sin against the Holy Ghost in the view of some.

There are some Church of Christ preachers who revere it as the only reliable translation. All over the country there are **churches**, under the pressure of the Pulpit Minister, w, here the eldership has made a "law" forbidding the use of any other translation in the pulpit or classes except "the old King James Version." Some will allow the use of the American Standard Version if desired.

Considering the above, can't you see why most later translations retained the word "**church**?" When the influence, popularity, and **hold** of the KJV is considered, when millions cling to it as if it were delivered from heaven, when the masses oppose any new translations, and when one looks at the religious world with all the **churches**, who would **dare** publish a Bible and leave out the word **church**? Who would buy a translation if the word **church** was not in it? Would you? "**Church**" is a dear and beloved word and **Church** people are not going to give it up, nor their beloved **Church**. How dare anyone publish a Bible without **Church** in it? For sure it will be a publication failure.

So, for obvious reasons, the majority of the new versions have retained the precious word **church**. Most have also transliterated the Greek word for **baptism** and have not translated it by **immersion** as it should be. The same is true of the word **deacon** which is not translated. Only three times does the word "deacon" appear, all in I Timothy 3 where many erroneously conclude that Paul is speaking of church officials. Every other instance the original Greek word is translated as "minister" or "servant." It was transliterated, that is, the Greek word was given an English spelling, to manufacture some semblance of proof for a **church office** called "Deacon."

Would **you** buy a Bible that did not have the word "church" in it? No good, faithful member of any **church** would have a Bible in his home that did not have the word "**church**" in it. It would border on blasphemy to leave **church** out of the Bible, desecrating that holy institution, the **church**!

Most **Examiner** readers have never seen a translation that does **not** use the word "**church**" The few translations that have done this have not sold well. But a few publishers have issued translations that do not use the word "**church**" It is good to have at least one for comparative study. It will lead you to some new insights.

One is "**Young's Literal Translation of the Holy Bible**," by Robert Young, author of the popular "Analytical Concordance to the Bible." He uses "assembly" as the translation of "ekklesia," and the word "church" is not found in it. It is published by Baker Book House. He dared to give us a translation of the word "ekklesia" rather than substituting the word "church." He destroys "the myth of the church" - there is no such thing in the NT Scriptures!

Another one is "**The Simple English Bible - New Testament;**" published by International Bible Publishing Company in New York. The word "congregation" is used to translate "ekklesia." There is no "church" in this N.T. (I think one or two of our own brethren were involved with this translation.) There are others like these.

## **The Living Oracles**

In 1826 Alexander Campbell provided for a translation of the New Covenant Scriptures. He recognized the errors and inadequacies of the KJV and a new translation was needed to correct such. In the **Preface** of the **Living Oracles** he offered several vital reasons justifying the need for a new, more accurate translation. Campbell argued that the "constant mutation in a living language" makes this new work necessary; that language changes and the changes in English "which have taken place since the reign of James I, do now render a new translation necessary." He offered several valid reasons for his position.

Also, Campbell correctly charged:

**"..that the common version was made at a time when religious controversy was at its zenith; and the tenets of the translators whether designedly or undesignedly, did, on many occasions give a wrong turn to words and sentences bearing upon their favorite dogmas."**

Campbell recognized the greatest obstacle to a better translation was the devotion or near-worship of the old KJV; the same type of thinking some devotees have to that translation even to this day. Note how Campbell put it:

**"But some are so wedded to the common version, that the very defects in it have become sacred; and an effort, however well intended, to put them in possession of one comparably superior in propriety, perspicuity, and elegance, is viewed very much in the light of 'making a new Bible' or of altering and amending the very word of God. Nay, some are prepared to doom every attempt of the kind, to the anathema, in the conclusion of the Apocalypse, upon those who add to the word of God, or subtract from it."**

That same spirit that Campbell identified then is alive today, finding its voice in a hard-core group of Church of Christ ministers who adamantly hold to the "blessed old King James" as the most accurate translation ever made. They urge that it be the **required** version for use in the pulpits and in the Sunday School classes in all "sound, faithful **churches:**" As I have mentioned, there are many **churches** controlled

by a dictator-type eldership where that authoritarian body has forbade the use of any other version except for the KJV or perhaps the ASV if one desires it. No pulpit minister will be hired who does not comply with this **law** and no teacher is allowed a class who does not bow the knee to this human decree.

Note carefully Campbell's statement that "**some are so wedded to the common version, that the very defects in it have become sacred...**" How wise his observation; how true it is today. For example, perhaps the greatest "defect" in the KJV is the unjustified substitution of the English word "**church**" rather than giving a true translation of the word "ekklesia." Church of Christ people like **all other church** people are "wedded" to this great defect in the translation. Perhaps no other group of pulpit ministers anywhere are more dedicated to the **church** than our clergy unless it is the Roman Catholic clergy. Our preachers are **church** preachers. They are **hired** by a **church** to preach for and to that **church**; and they are paid by that **church**. Most of them would reject any version of Scriptures that does not have the dearly beloved, all-important "**church**" in it. This is one of the main reasons you can't find many copies of Campbell's translation, The Living Oracles, since it does not have **church** in it! It effectively removes the **church** from God's Word, where it never had any right to be at all.

Can you imagine the world without the **church**? Perish the thought! Condemn as the vilest of heretics anyone who would proclaim that there is no such thing as our beloved **Church** of Christ institution! This denominational **church** institution is no better than any of the other denominational **church** institutions! Today's well-entrenched **Church** of Christ **church** and the Independent Christian **Church** stand as the main reason the proclamation of undenominational/non-denominational service to the Lord has died from **our** hearts and preaching. How can members and promoters of these institutional **churches** **consistently** oppose denominationalism and proclaim a non-denominational message? They can't and by and large have stopped making any pretense at such. How can those who belong to a denomination condemn that practice in others? Gone is the day of our forceful plea - "Let us be Christians only, only Christians." That is not enough. The preaching is that people must be a "member" of one of our Church of Christ **Churches** to please God and go to heaven! The disciples of Christ are required today to "**join or place** membership" in some organization or institution called "the local **Church** of Christ."

Also to be seriously considered are our essential and elaborate, beloved **church** buildings. Up to \$10 million is now being paid for a headquarters building for each **Church** of Christ **church**.

**In modern practice, each Church** of Christ must have a professional, hired employee called a "Pulpit Minister." All the other **churches** have a pulpit minister

(pastor) and a **church** building. Someone has to run and control the business affairs of the corporate institution named the **Church** of Christ, so the Board of Elders has been fashioned for this authoritarian role. The Presbyterians and others have their Board of Elders or Presbyters, so the **Church** of Christ Church is in good company. The Baptist **Churches** are said to be in error since their **churches** are controlled and operated by the Pastor and a Board of Deacons.

The Church of Christ has arrived at last. Its adherents can make it without Christ (He is not enough!) but they can't make it without their **Church** of Christ **church!**

## More About the Living Oracles

In bringing about a new translation of the Scriptures, Campbell selected three able scholars to do the work. They produced an excellent translation that was published by Campbell. It is worthy of serious note that Campbell did **not** call it by the erroneous title - New Testament, but called it "Living Oracles" a more appropriate title for that collection of documents. Campbell understood that the 27 letters and historical records that we call the "New Testament" is **not** the new testament (covenant) referred to in Scripture. For that matter, the 39 books and historical records that we call the "Old Testament" (covenant) is **not** the old testament/covenant. Such erroneous labeling has been the source of great religious error through the ages.

The 27 letters or histories **relate to** the new, covenant to be sure; but they are no part of it at all. The **new** covenant that God has made with us is not found on parchment or paper. **It is written on our hearts**, as an agreement between the Father and each individual who claims through faith in Jesus Christ the salvation provided in Christ (II Cot. 3:3; Heb. 8:6-13). Our people need desperately to learn this vital truth and understand what it means. The **old** covenant was the 10 commandments given by God at Sinai.

Have you ever seen a copy of **The Living Oracles** translation? It is my guess that 75% of **Church** of Christ members and Christian Church members have never heard of it, much less read any of it. What a shame.

### A. Campbell - The Heretic

The word "church" does not appear in **The Living Oracles!** Imagine that! Isn't that terrible? If Campbell were alive today he would be banned from teaching at any **Church** of Christ or Independent Christian**Church**. Campbell did not believe in the **church**. There is no **church** in his translation. He took it out! If he were alive today, can you imagine what our pulpit Ministers and Elders would do to him? He

would denounce authoritarian elderships with the same severity and lash of "**The Living Oracles**" that he did the clergy of his day. Sectarianism and denominationalism were wrong then and they are wrong **now**.

The scholars who did the translating, along with Campbell, knew that the English word "church" does **not** translate the Greek word "ekklesia." This is a fact that is universally acknowledged by language authorities and scholars. The word "church" is totally misleading. Inherent in the word "church," as it is commonly used, therefore lies all the apparent justification for the **institutional Church** of today, by whatever name it is called, with all its trappings.

**Put this down as fact:** In the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ as proclaimed by His apostles **there was no such thing as a church**, a religious institution. There was no "universal **church**" nor a "local**church**" **There was no religious institution or organization**. The early saints did not build, establish, join or hold membership in a **church** of any kind.

Dear brother or sister, if **you** are a member of a **church**, meaning a religious organization or institution, then you have joined something that Jesus did **not** build, something of which He is neither the Head nor the Saviour. Jesus did not die for a **church**. He died for lost **people**. He died for you and me, **individuals**, not some corporate structure. There is, therefore, no **Church**, no religious organization of Christ in God's plan.

We are not required to find the right **Church** organization and get into that **institution** in order to be saved or do the will of God in any way. Salvation is not **in** some **church**; salvation is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

The world without the **church**! Perish the thought! This is the feeling of **church** people.

**Christians without a church?** Yes, that is the way it was in the beginning. There is no **church** in the Scriptures. There should be no **church** today.

Dear brother and sister, shocking though this truth may be to many of you, it is clear and certain. There is no **church** in the Bible! It is a vicious myth! Understand it and act upon this truth - now!