

The Origin of the Word "church"

By Andy Zoppelt

Part 1: The Word that Changed the World

Language and its use of words is vital, it is the fundamental means in which we use to conveying and pass information from one person to another. The changing of one word can literally change the world. Therefore, translators are given an extreme responsibility in making sure they get it right, especially key words. When Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my *ekklesia*." (Mat 16:18) The Greek word there is *ekklesia* and is pronounced ek-klay-see-ah. The translators purposely and knowingly used a word identifying a building to support a clergy rather than a word that would build us together as the body of Christ in unity establishing the kingdom of God in every city. Jesus did not and would not have said, "upon the rock I will build my church." The word "church" represents the complete opposite of building His kingdom on this earth as it is in heaven. Jesus would rather have said, "Upon this rock I will build my called out assembly"....a people called out of this world by faith in Him, assembling and gathering in one name and for one purpose all being one.

Our word "Church" is one of those words that has impacted the world and has subverted the whole purpose for which it was intended. Because the translators used the word "church," meaning a building, instead of a more accurate word reflecting a functioning body, it has affected our whole approach to the meaning of the body of Christ. We have been given a word from the translators that has nothing to do with the original Greek word *ekklesia*. There is not a single Greek word to back up the word church. So why is it there?

The early assembly of believers did not have a clergy distinct from the rest of the body. Clergy with titles and authority was foreign to the early disciples. It was the rise of this authoritarian clergy that needed a building to control the people both religiously and politically and to gather the people around the clergy. The Catholic Church and the Church of England both used the word "church" and its meaning as a building to hold the people in subjection to their control. Without a building the clergy would have lost their power over the people. Even today, without a building the clergy system would fall. This system of clergy/laity and the use of a building is what we have come to know as the "institutional" church system. This system was **totally** foreign to the vocabulary and the life of the disciples of Jesus, who built and depended on the move of the Holy Spirit through **all** the saints being built together. Therefore the retaining of the word "church" in our translations of the bible became crucial for the survival of the institutional church system even to this day.

To change the true meaning and function of the Greek word "*ekklesia*" to our English word "church" strengthened the clergy system and their power over the people. The statement, "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" has been the downfall and corruption of body ministry. The original intent was relational and not institutional. For in all the writings of the first and second century we do not find an "institutional" treatment of "*ekklesia*."

The new Webster's international dictionary, 1909 edition, gives this definition of the word: "Church (church), n. [ME. *chirche*, fr. AS. *circe*, fr. Gr. *kyriakon* the Lord's house, fr. *kyriakos*

concerning a master or lord, fr. kyrios master, lord, fr. kyros power, authority; akin to Skr. gram mighty, bold OIr. caur, cur, hero. Cf. KIRK.] 1. **A building** set apart for public worship, esp... 2. **A place** of worship of **any** religion, as, **formerly**, a Jewish or **pagan temple** or a mosque. Acts six. 37.”

There were pagans using the word “church” long before Christians ever began using it. The word church goes back to the Greek *kuriakê oikia*, which means “the house belong to the lord” or “the Lord’s house”. *kuriakon* (koo-ree-ak-on') means “belonging to the Lord” and *oikos* (oy'-kos) meaning “house.” So if the pagans used *kuriakê oikia* referring to a building belonging to the Lord, what lord were they referring to? The “Lord’s house (*kuriakê oikia*) was used in the 4th century and clearly was not referring to the Lord Jesus, but rather to the Lord Mithra the “sun-god”; the son god was a famous god among the pagans but with many different names. It was Constantine, who worshipped Mithra as his god and he converted the Mithra god into the Christian house or church. He was the one that transformed the called out assembly into a church recognized by a building and he then set his clergy in charge of the house...as we still see today with our pastors etc.. It all worked out quite nicely for him because he now had both the church and the state under his control.

The tie between the church and state had wielded so much power in history that the framers of our constitution would not permit any church to control our government. The first Amendment to the United States Constitution provides that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" and Article VI specifies that “no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”

The framers of our constitution indeed understood the power of such a tie. But what we have today is a bunch of buildings called church with each pastor having his own kingdom separated from the others in the city... they guard that position and place with their lives. Our assemblies were never to be separated within the city...it was clearly one called out assembly in each city as we see in scripture. Kingdoms are made up of cities within the kingdom and that is what we see in scriptures with the assemblies in the city. The called out assemblies jointly made up the kingdom of God with one King. It was the assembly at Ephesus, the assembly at Corinth and the assembly at Philadelphia, etc.. There was not a bunch of churches ruled by pastors and elders in each city, that would constitute a division within the body of Christ and nullify His rule over the city assemblies...truly a gross injustice and sin.

Tyndale created problems early on in his translation of the scriptures into English. Tyndale, a man who was martyred for his bible, used the word "church" (*churche*) only twice, in Acts 14:13 and 19:37; and in both cases he understandingly understood church as a building connected to idol-worship:

Here are the places he used the word church, it is in old English:

Acts 14:13, Then Iupiters Preste which dwelt before their cite brought oxe and garlondes vnto the churche porche and wolde have done sacrificise with the people.
Now here is an updating version of his translation to present:

Acts 14:13, "Then Jupiter's Priest which dwelt before their city brought oxen and garlands into the church [pagan house of worship] porch and would have done sacrifice with the people."

Here is the other verse in which he used the word church

Acts 19:37 "For ye have brought hyther these me whiche are nether robbers of churches [pagan houses of worship] nor yet despisers of youre goddes."

Updating Acts 19:37-38, "For you have brought these men to me which are nether robbers of churches nor yet despisers of your goddess." The reference is to the temple and goddess of Diana of the Ephesians.

Clearly Tyndale understood that the word church represented a pagan house of worship and translated it as thus. He lived much closer to the understanding of the word church than we. His translation was not something that the clergy-driven churches wanted to be known to the many ignorant people of that day who didn't have bibles in English. That excuse of the availability of the scriptures need not go on today; we have bible programs that go directly to the Greek. Biblesoft has an excellent program that we can switch from the English to the Greek, there may be others but I don't know of them, but my point is made.

Greek *kuriakê oikia* ("house of the lord") relates to many different languages: Icelandic kirkja; Swedish kyrka; Norwegian and Danish kirke; German Kirche; Dutch kerk, Estonian kirik, Finnish kirkko and Old English cirice → Middle English chirche → today's English church.

"CHURCH: From the Greek *kuriakêe*, "house of the Lord," a word which passed to the Gothic tongue; the Goths being the first of the northern hordes converted to Christianity, adopted the word from the Greek Christians of Constantinople, and so it came to us Anglo-Saxons (Trench, Study of Words). But Lipsius, from circus, from whence kirk, a circle, because the oldest temples, **as the Druid ones**, were circular in form." (Fausset's Bible Dictionary)

A building would more serve the purpose of a religious group with a built-in hierarchy than an organic body of believers ministering and loving one another. Christians originally didn't build buildings for some kind of service as we see today, they were clearly distinguished from the pagans whose focus was on buildings, statues, ritual and physical objects. From its earliest usage, the word "church" has been understood in pagan traditions, then later in Roman Catholicism and now in this present day as a building, but never has the word "church" been demonstrated or justified from a biblical stand point to represent the Greek word *ekklesia*. Church was a pagan concept and not a Christian one.

When I gave my life to Jesus in 1964, I was falsely led to believe that the activities of the "church" were biblical and an essential part of my being a Christian. As a hungry man for God I just couldn't understand how sitting in a pew or chair and listening to some person preach from the bible could change my life... especially when the bible spoke overwhelmingly of my relationship with the members and not a pastor. I wanted to experience life, not just hearing about it.

Many say, "We know the church is the building." Do we? Do we act like it? No, of course not. We **go** to church rather than each individual functioning as members of an assembly. We ask people what church they go to. When we take up a collection for the church the money goes to the building...something of no eternal value. Each building has **its own** pastor, its **own name** and its **own congregation**. Then what is even more amazing is that we will often quote Hebrews 10:25 for the one missing the church service. But let's see if this verse matches our typical church service,

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting **one another**, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

First, they were an assembly that had purpose; much like the assembly line of an automobile factory where the various parts come together to make the car. Each part had a function within the whole body, a person absent is a part missing.

This verse does not look much like a church service but rather an environment where free exchange is possible.

"A number of bible-translations might cause the reader to think that Hebrews 10:25 refers to 'going to church'. But, a closer study of the Greek text of that verse and its context shows that the apostle was talking about something very different...(Here, it is also good to keep in mind that the English word "church" was invented in Catholic times, in the Middle Ages, and that the customs and practices around that word and concept, are of Catholic origin.)" from the websight: <http://www.biblepages.web.surftown.se/ea04e.htm>

Ephesians 4:15-16, even takes this a few steps further and clearly identifies the purpose of our assembling, "speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head — Christ — from whom **the whole body**, joined and knit together by what **every joint supplies**, according to the effective working by which **every part does its share**, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love." **Nothing** like our church today.

They all had a part in an assembly of people who had in common their commitment to Jesus and to each other. Their coming together involved exhortation and fellowship with one another. They were not an audience for a single speaker, but a living body much like our human bodies. 1 Corinthians 12:18-19, 24, 26, "But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased...But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be **no divisions** in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it."

The word church is responsible for destroying all the above while ignoring the kingdom of God as it is in heaven. What are we thinking when we read the Lord's prayer? "Your kingdom come, your will be done **on earth as it is in Heaven**...for your is the kingdom, the power and the glory." All what we see representative of the church today is against all that is representative of the kingdom of heaven.

Tyndale's translation brought the down the wrath of the Clergy and it cost him his life. What do we think is going to happen when people start realizing that church has nothing to do with the kingdom of God? The most hated people of tomorrow are going to be those who challenge our religious system today...and that challenge is beginning to take root.

Many in the clergy derive their prestige and livelihood from a clergy system with its functions in a specifically designed building. A change back to the faith that was once given to the saints rings fear to the order of our institutional church system. Such words as: "bishop," "office of," "pastor," "deacon," etc., have been improperly translated to build an empire around men and denominational divisions.

When the King James Bible was published in 1611, it was flawed before it got started. Archbishop Bancroft, the head of the Anglican Church, set fourteen rules of translation to maintain the doctrine and practices of the Anglican church of England. King James made himself "head" of the Church of England, and he required a translation which would facilitate his control over the church and the people. James understood "no building, no bishop, no king."

Arch Bishop Bancroft and Erasmus were the architects of the King James Version translation; they were far from being committed saints. The translators were obligated to fit the translation with the Anglican agenda and beliefs without any conflict between church and state. Their interest was not in the kingdom of God, but an institutional system with its paid clergy.

Bancroft's third rule required "the old ecclesiastical words to be kept, such as 'church' instead of 'congregation.'" He also wanted the old offices of bishop, deacon, pastor to relate to their "most commonly used by the most eminent fathers" (rule four). The King James translation maintained the "*office of*" in their translation, unsupported in scripture in order to support the Church of England, so we find words added into the text like "*office of*" a bishop or a deacon. They also purposely translated many words differently to agree with the Anglican Church. If you look in your bible, you will find "*office of*" in *italics*, in the KJV... italics meaning it is not a part of the original Greek text.

Truth is mounting each day for those seeking truth. When we realize that the word "church" was Satan's highest achievement in tearing apart the kingdom of God into thousands of fragments and leaving the body of Christ as a useless lethargic audience exalting its pastors; then we can see how important the word church was to Satan's harlot. Every time we use the word "church", we are using something that God hates, something added by Satan into the mix of God's word. "Church", if we are willing to be honest is Satan's word and not God's word. The church has destroyed body ministry for the sake of the clergy; it has given it a name to mixed in with the name of Jesus, it has built walls, created disputes, competitions and heresies of the highest order. By all definitions the church is the Harlot and one day there will be a mass exit... it is already starting to happen. I have received thousands of emails telling me that when they go to church that something is wrong... well there is, it is all wrong from its very foundation placed in many translations. There are a few translations that don't use church.

People tell me, "Andy, there are some good people in the church and some good pastors who are

sincere.” This thesis is not about individuals, it is about a structure that has nothing to do with a book we honor as the foundation of our faith.

Putting a name on our buildings, dividing our cities into hundreds and thousands of churches and where we have a pastor doing all the ministering (clergy/laity) eliminating body ministry and fellowship in the gatherings...that of itself has been the greatest insult to the Holy name of Jesus, His commands and the establishment of His kingdom. This system cannot be restored because it never was founded on the words of Jesus. God is not going to restore the harlot. You tell me these are strong words, well; we are dealing with the eternal souls of individuals. Paul and Jesus both used stronger words than I.

Paul used strong words in predicting what we see as the denominational structure of division led by men within the assembly, "For **I know** this, that after my departure savage wolves [strong word] will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears." Acts 20:29-31, NKJV

Notice how clear Paul maps out these conditions: first it is something he knows. Second, it happens after he leaves, Third, men will come in without considering God's possession and purpose of the flock and will draw the sheep after them dividing the sheep, not around Jesus, but around themselves and their ministries. They are called “salvage wolves” because this is the nature of the wolf to divide the flock and pick out the weak and literally tear its carcass apart. The true shepherd gathers, not scattering the flock...something rarely seen. The institutional church system has the heart of a man at its center and that is what makes her a harlot. She has created for herself a name...many names of blasphemy...names in defiance to the only Holy name we are to meet and the only name that identifies us as His sons. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name."

I keep hearing these words spoken to me from my friend in China, "Our biggest prayer is that the doors will not open to you (Americans), you will destroy us, communism can't destroy us, but you can with your religion." Men without God's power have turned to their own resources and the church has found no problem going on without God. Listen sometimes to the ambition of pastors, they sound like an advertisement for their church straight out of Madison Avenue. Deceived pastors through the church system are subtly bowing to the Babylonian gold of the Harlot.

The word church is from hell, it formed out of the minds of men and destroys every word out of the mouth of God. It is a mixture of leaven into the flour.

The purpose of the called out assembly is to be an army and to bring down the principalities and power in heavenly places and to place His enemies under His feet (Psalm 110). Jesus said the gates of hell would not be able to stand against the called out assembly. Ezekiel 37, in speaking of the valley of dry bones, became an exceeding great army. We are to overcome the world by our faith in Jesus. We are to have the power of God working through us, God always has power when He is in the midst of His people. The eternal purpose of God is mentioned in Ephesians

3:10-11, "The intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the called out assembly **to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose** which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Read more on the eternal purpose.

We are salt that has lost its saltiness and we are being trampled underfoot of men.

This is the time to wake up, get a hold of the anointing and walk in the light, to live the crucified life, to be seated with Christ in heavenly places and to love the Lord and one another...

The Origin of the Word "church"

By Andy Zoppelt

Part 2: Man's Niche to Build

"You mistakenly think we conceal what we worship since we have no temples or altars... How can anyone build a temple to Him, when the whole world can't contain Him? Even I, a mere human, travel far and wide. So how can anyone shut up the majesty of so great a Person within one small building? Isn't it better for Him to be dedicated in our minds and consecrated in our innermost hearts - rather than in a building?" (Minicus Felix, *Octavius*, 2nd Century A.D.).

"We have no temples or altars.' This statement, referring to Christians, comes from the pen of the apologist Minicus Felix, c 200, and all evidence supports its accuracy. Throughout at least the first two centuries there were no church buildings as such" (-The Early Christian Church - J.G. Davies).

"When the church was very young, it had no buildings. Let us begin with that striking fact. That the church had no buildings is the most noticeable of the points of difference between the church of the early days and the church of today. In the minds of most people today, "church" means first a building, probably something else second; but seldom does "the church" stand for anything other than a building. Yet here is the fact with which we start: the early church possessed no buildings and carried on its work for a great many years without erecting any." (When the church was very young -Ernest Loosley).

Lightfoot says that there were no church buildings as such before the third century. Since Lightfoot made that statement, however, archaeologists found a most interesting place in Rome. Roman houses - unless they were the great mansions - were relatively small. What archaeologists found was a place with the facade of two houses still untouched, but with the internal walls torn out to make a larger room. And from everything that was found there, the archaeologists believe that this was a church building. This structure is dated at the end of the second century. But whether one accepts Lightfoot's starting point in the third century, or whether one dates it at the end of the second century, it really makes no difference. There is no biblical norm as to where, and where not, the church should meet. The central fact is that the early concept of the church had no connection with a church building.

Constantine (280-337), the Roman Emperor and his mother, Empress Helena, built many pagan temples. After his conversion in 313, he continued his custom of building, but this time it was "Christian" temples. They simply went from worshipping the pagan gods to the memorializing the dead saints. Many pagan buildings were later converted to churches. This was really the official beginning of recognizing buildings as churches.

We want something we can see and someone to represent us... something physical. Whether we are building a building to reach the sky as the tower of Babel or an edifice to hold our pastor's meetings on Sunday... we want **our** own building.

I would like to respond to one thing I am often challenged with. Some say, "doesn't the bible say they met in the temple and from house to house?" Yes, but their meeting in the temple was nothing like what we are doing in our church buildings. First, they met in the outer court, a very large open area. It would be like meeting in a park and not inside a church building. Second, they didn't own the temple and pay a staff for the upkeep. Third, the meetings in the temple served as a tool to reach the Jewish people, much like the same reason Jesus went to the temple. Fourth, they didn't have a pastor who was over the temple like we do our churches. Fifth, the temple was not a building that divided the body of Christ. Sixth, they didn't name the temple like we give our churches names. Seventh, they didn't conduct all of their operations out of the temple. Eighth, the temple didn't belong to them... it was a public facility. Often we hear of places like China where thousands of people will gather together in open fields or in open public places, this would be much like the early believers meeting in the temple (outer court area).

Then I hear, "didn't Paul meet in the synagogues and in the school of Tyrannus? (Acts 19:8-10)"

Most of the above reasons for meeting in the temple apply here also. But let's point out a few: First, Paul met in the synagogue "reasoning and persuading" them concerning the kingdom of God (evangelistic). It was when it became contentious that Paul moved the meeting to the school of Tyrannus where he continued for two years. The school of Tyrannus was a "public building" and not a "church" building. The early believers would use public facilities as long as they were permitted. Eventually the facility served their purpose and they would move on. The use of a public facility is much like our conventions. We use the public facility as a temporary facility for a specific purpose and move on.

This was not something that the believers spent millions of dollars on and divided themselves by naming their buildings. This kind of reasoning is only dodging the bullet in hopes of justifying our use of creating divisions around "our" pastors or church leaders.

If done today, it would be like thousands of home assemblies gathering in parks or public facilities to worship or to listen to a special message from one of the leaders. Such would draw attention to the public and often would draw the public into the meetings as an evangelistic tool. Our public meeting would show our unity and not our divisions.

When Peter saw Jesus, Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration, his first inclination was to build three tabernacles.

In Acts 7:48, Stephen angered the Pharisees by saying that God "dwells not in temples made with hands" (Acts 7:48). Such a statement and change would abolish everyone from the gatekeeper to the high priest who served the old system of the temple. What Stephen's statement said back then would be an offense to our spending of billions of dollars of God's money on the millions of buildings. What he said then is just as offensive as it was to those Pharisees, God does not dwell in "Churches" or any other building; our focus is not to be distracted on the material but on the temple of the Holy Spirit. That departure of emphasis has permitted the enemy to come in our midst and pick us off one at a time. Though our buildings might be able to withstand a hurricane, its members so loosely joined can't.