

Introduction

Most of the letters in the New Testament were addressed to regions, sometimes cities, rather than to individual congregations. When Jesus prayed, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven,” he obviously had in mind territory or spheres. I often ask groups of church leaders how many Christian Churches are there in their region. People will respond with numbers in the hundreds; however, the biblical answer is ONE. There is only one church with many congregations. The issue of the size of the region to be served is determined through the revelation of the Holy Spirit. How then do Christians, who determine to be “One in Christ,” many of whom are part of other fellowships and/or denominations operate in a region and not lose their personal distinctiveness? What kind of structure allows for a John 17 commitment that maintains a movement rather than a monument mentality? It is not enough to say just be relational, although I believe that the relational connection is the basis of all ministry. If we are going to operate in a region with effective ministry outreach and discipleship, then there needs to be some biblical framework for such effort.

Ecclesia - Definition

When most Christians think of the word “church,” they usually think of their own congregation and/or specific location where their congregation meets. The word “church” in the Greek language is Ecclesia and does not refer to a building but rather “an assembly or a legislative body.” Hundreds of years before Jesus, the word Ecclesia had this meaning. The Romans took this concept and actually expanded it. When the Romans conquered a people, they sent a group—called an Ecclesia—to introduce and saturate the vanquished country with Roman culture from the banking and judicial system to sports and entertainment. This is exactly what Jesus meant when he said: “I will build my church (Ecclesia).” He meant a group that would introduce and saturate the world and the specific culture where they lived with His teachings.

Purpose of the Ecclesia

The mistranslation of the word Ecclesia, by the word CHURCH has contributed to the failure of Christians to operate/cooperate together beyond their individual congregations to effect change within their cultures. We have not focused on working collectively to bring the influence of the Kingdom of God into the cultures we inhabit. It is the intent of this paper to provoke a discussion to seek a path to the original concept of Ecclesia in order that Christians may recapture our rightful call and that the people of God can be released into the world in order to effect change within the culture. I stress this concept of Ecclesia not as an attempt to remove the term “church” but rather to provide context for the need to turn our attention beyond the walls of our individual congregations and look to saturating the cultures in which we dwell with the Kingdom of God.

A Holy Nation

Biblical unity across denominational and cultural lines is key for the Ecclesia to impact society. I will discuss biblical unity in greater detail shortly, but first, there is another adjustment many of us will need to make as we seek biblical unity. In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter notes the Ecclesia is three things: a chosen people; a royal priesthood; and a holy nation. The concept of a chosen people has been taught and preached on since the founding of Christianity, and the Reformation helped rediscover the priesthood of all believers. The third of Peter’s list, the holy nation, is where I would next like to focus....

If you read the Torah, it is amazing the details God provided the Israelites to take them out of slavery and form them into an organized, functioning corporate nation from social laws to health guidelines to worship. They were intended to be a holy nation and their holiness is what was to make Israel unique and distinct as a nation. The Israelites were specifically instructed to situate around God and His Presence. God was to be the center of this incredibly diverse group of people. It was God that held the various tribes together. It is important to note that the people camped by tribe, clan, and family. Each tribe camped by their tribal banner so that there was no mistaking the tribe of Judah from the tribe of Dan and so on. When each of these uniquely different tribes gathered together around God providing their

own unique gifts and talents, the nation of Israel was complete. An individual tribe, clan, family—local congregation—is not sufficient in its own right. God designed all the tribes, clans, and families to come together to form a holy nation....

I would suggest that most Christian leaders have focused on tribe, clan, and family and have ignored nation building. There may be the occasional community-wide outreach event such as the Global Day of Prayer, a Billy Graham Crusade, or a Right to Life walk that local congregations participate in together, but this is not the same as nation building. The tribe, clan, and family are vital components of God's Kingdom, but it is important not to get stuck there and conclude that is enough. There is something more that God is looking for—He says He wants us to be a holy nation—right now. God's directive is clear in 1 Peter 2: 9-10. A tribe, clan, or family (local body) should ask itself if they need to participate in nation building in order to be fully involved in God's clearly revealed will?

Heaven's Call—The Premise for Biblical Unity

Jesus words in John 17:20-23 clearly focus on unity:

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which you gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

Unity is not a point to disregard because it may be hard or inconvenient. It is a command from our Lord to join together. In order for the Ecclesia to function in unity, there is more needed than an understanding of the term Ecclesia itself and more needed than agreement with John 17:20-23.

Why A New Wineskin Is Needed for Transition?

In his book, *The Complete Wineskin*, Harold Eberly writes:

Whenever the Holy Spirit fills people with the “new wine,” the structure or organization in which they function must change. Old wineskins rip. New wineskins must be used to hold the additional life and power of God...The time for God to move is at hand. Therefore, we should expect our present wineskins to rip. There can be no mighty spiritual awakenings in our day without a shaking of our Church organizations, leaders and structures. If you are looking for the Second Coming of Jesus, or if you are praying to God to move upon your church, your city, your local schools, your family or your own heart, then the first thing you must look for is a new wineskin.

(Harold R. Eberly, *The Complete Wineskin* (Yakima, WA: Winepress Publishing, 1977, pp. 1-2).

What is the new wineskin? I believe there are three forms or aspects that the Ecclesia is to manifest to form a new wineskin. While each are equal in God's sight they have a separate function and are all part of one entity. One form is the care of the Ecclesia; the second is equipping and training of believers; and the third is the ministry of the people of the Ecclesia. My friend Gary Crawford has a wonderful illustration of this threefold form that the Ecclesia is to take.



In the pictures here, there is a can of coffee beans on the left. The middle picture is of coffee beans and coffee grinders. The third picture shows a cup of brewed coffee. In this analogy, the can containing the coffee beans represents the government of the Ecclesia. The grinders represent the equipping and training of the Ecclesia through the five-fold ascension gifts. The cup of coffee represents the ministry of the Ecclesia lived out by the members of the body. It is all coffee, but it has different aspects and functions. When the three different components of the Ecclesia are operating properly and together, the aroma of Christ is revealed much like the aroma of coffee is released in a geographic region. (2 Corinthians 2:14-15).

Elders; Five-fold ascension gifts & the Ecclesia

The third part of the coffee analogy represents the people of God doing the work of ministry. When the five-fold ministers equip and train God's people in local assemblies, what is released into a region is a Holy Spirit-empowered force to bring change to the area. To finish the analogy, the aroma of coffee is released in a cup of brewed coffee much like the aroma of Christ is released by a properly equipped Ecclesia to draw men, women, and young people to the Savior.

Each region that chooses to come together in biblical unity to do ministry together will have its own geographic area of concern and will have its own ministries unique to that specific region and Ecclesia. I share our experiences in Florida to help give you an idea of how this model looks when it is being lived out.

City of Refuge

It has been a great blessing since coming to Florida to hear of numerous people of God with similar calls to other places in the United States. Different terminology is used, but it is the same idea being advocated. George Otis calls these pockets of geography set aside for the Lord as, "Oasis of Hope." Cindy Jacobs speaks of "Goshen." Chuck Pierce refers to them as "Frontier Outposts." Mike Bickle of I-Hop Kansas City uses the term the Lord gave us "City of Refuge." All of us are speaking about the same phenomena just using different terms. There will be "pockets of His Presence" where God's favor rests that will differentiate these pockets from the rest of the United States. Think for a moment about the land of Goshen (Genesis 47:27). The people of Goshen experienced blessings from the Lord, and their land was called the "best in all Egypt." "These regions that God is establishing will be cared for in supernatural ways (Psalms 65:9-13) where natural crops flourish, businesses thrive in a time of national decline and despair, families are strong and marriages cherished, righteousness is found in the law and its interpretation, the Ecclesia works in harmony to see the Kingdom advanced, and there is a sense of great Shalom on the land and its' people." (note found in file without source) Revival, awakening and transformation continue to increase because the Presence of God is evident! Each pocket will be distinguished by its uniqueness as it relates to "The Presence of God" in revival, awakening and transformation and its' unique focus of ministry.

OMC COLLABORATIVE BLUEPRINT

What follows is a discussion of the three foci that I believe will help distinguish the OMC in contributing to building a holy nation and becoming a city of refuge: the presence of God; occupying territory; and restoration. I share them with you to illustrate the kind of thing I believe God will be doing in the territory to which God has called you. Undoubtedly you will be given different foci but with a common heart for Israel. Recently, the Lord brought these foci together for me in the restoration books of the Bible: Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. The word restoration means “the action of returning something to a former owner, place, or condition.” This is a great word to describe what God is doing in these books and what He is calling the Ecclesia to be about in our day.

Focus One: The Presence of God-Ezra; **Focus Two:** Rebuilding the Land-Nehemiah; **Focus Three:** Restoration-Esther

I have the growing sense that the OMC is being prepared specifically to care for Jews who are returning to Israel.

Conclusion

I believe that the new wineskin the Lord is leading us to in our day makes oneness not only possible but sustainable. Sustainable ministry does not rest on a single person or office but rather rests on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Romans 11:29 says: *“For God's gifts and His call are irrevocable.”* Since the gifts are irrevocable, the gifts will be available to any region that comes together in biblical oneness, until Jesus returns.

However, the new wine will be in the new wineskin. I myself believe that the model I have suggested to you in this paper is the way “church” will look like in the coming decades. It will be a church made up of different denominations, fellowships, and races. Note, each theological understanding maintains its distinctiveness and uniqueness. There will still be Baptists, Methodists, Pentecostals, etc; however, each of these individual churches will have a commitment to biblical oneness that brings them into alignment with other like-minded bodies in the same region. This will be seen in local church bodies voluntarily placing themselves in alignment for combined ministry with other local church bodies, which in turn will create an avalanche of trained and equipped people, from all the churches in the network, being released into the region to proclaim righteousness.