

THE UNDENOMINATIONAL CHURCH

by Michael S. Cole, M.D., and John Sigle

Denominationalism is wrong. A denomination signifies a division or a segment. Denominationalism means devotion to denominational principles or interests. All the religious denominations of our day were established by men, hundreds of years after Jesus Christ established His church in Jerusalem on Pentecost, about 33 A.D. (Acts 2). We claim that the modern-day church of Christ is NOT a denomination. Please consider with us why this claim is made.

DENOMINATIONALISM IS WRONG

Christ established but ONE church (Matt. 16:18, Acts 20:28, Col. 1:24, Eph. 4:4). Christ is not divided. The apostle Paul said that religious division is wrong (I Cor. 1:10-13). Jesus prayed for the unity of all believers (John 17:20-21). Our Lord did not work against His own prayer for unity by establishing conflicting and contradictory denominations. Denominationalism retards the salvation of lost souls (John 17:21). Denominationalism breeds skepticism and doubt. Different doctrines cause many to lose respect for the Scriptures.

IN APOSTOLIC TIMES CHRISTIANS BELONGED TO NO DENOMINATION

Christians were members of the universal church for which Christ died. When one accepts Christ, there is no need to accept anything else (Col. 2:9-10). When you accept Christ only, you become a Christian, a disciple of Christ. Others in any place who do the same thing will be, like us, Christians only.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE UNDENOMINATIONAL CHURCH

1. *It has no denominational founder.*

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it, said Jesus (Matt. 16:18).

2. *It has no denominational head.*

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence (Col. 1:18).
Christ is the Sovereign Head of the church.

The undenominational church does not recognize any human head or headquarters.

3. *It has no denominational creed.*

We have no creed but Christ. Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God is our confession of faith (Matt. 16:16, Acts 8:37).

We have no book of discipline or rule of faith. We practice only the Scriptures. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Tim. 3:16).

God's Word is sufficient to cover every problem of congregational organization and activity. THEREFORE, HUMAN CREEDS ARE UNNECESSARY. As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue (II Peter 1:3).

4. *It has no denominational name.*

The church of the New Testament was known as:

The church	(Eph. 3:10, Col. 1:24)
The church of God	(I Cor. 1:2, I Tim. 3:15)
The body of Christ	(I Cor. 12:27, Eph. 4:12)
The church of the Lord	(Acts 20:28)
The church of Christ	(Matt. 16:18, Rom. 16:16)

The individual members of the church were known as:

Disciples	(Acts 11:26)
Christians	(Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28, I Pet. 4:16)
Saints	(Rom. 1:7, Phil. 1:1, Col. 1:2)

Brethren	(Col. 1:2, James 1:2)
Children of God	(Gal. 3:26, I John 3:1)
Priests	(I Pet. 2:5, Rev. 1:6)

5. *It has no denominational organization.*

There is no ecclesiastical organization, no popes, no cardinals, no archbishops, no church councils or conventions. Each congregation of the Church of Christ is independent, under the authority of Christ as revealed in the New Testament. We have a plurality of qualified elders (Acts 14:23), just as was found in the first century church.

6. *It has no denominational worship.*

We have no denominational rites or ceremonies. We seek to worship in spirit and truth (John 4:24), following the pattern of the first century church. Each Lord's day worship consists of:

Lord's Supper	(Acts 20:7)
Contribution	(I Cor. 16:2)
A cappella Singing	(Eph. 5:19)
Praying	(Luke 18:1)
Preaching	(II Tim. 4:2)

7. *It has no denominational requirements for membership.*

We ask people to do only what men and women in the New Testament were commanded to do:

Hear and understand God's Word	(Acts 8:30-31)
Believe	(Acts 8:37)
Repent	(Acts 17:30)
Confess	(Acts 8:37)
Be baptized for remission of sins	(Acts 2:38)

After obeying the gospel, TO WHAT DENOMINATION DID THE FIRST CENTURY CHRISTIANS BELONG? Catholicism had its beginning in the 7th century. Protestantism had its beginning in the 16th century. New Testament Christians belonged simply to the undenominational church.

THE CURE FOR DENOMINATIONALISM

We must have an unreserved commitment to the Bible as the sole, objective standard in religion. Unity can exist only when there is allegiance to a single objective religious authority. When all men will lay down their creeds, disciplines, manuals, confessions of faith, catechisms, think-so's, maybe's, and subjective feelings, and with an unprejudiced and receptive heart turn to the Word of God, then, and ONLY then, will unity result. We must be committed to being nothing, calling ourselves nothing, obeying nothing, and saying nothing except that which is authorized by the Word of God.

CONCLUSION

Surely, it is possible to occupy an undenominational position. It is our plea for all to abandon the things that divide those who profess to be Christians, and occupy, with us, this undenominational ground.

If we preach ONLY the gospel, it will produce in our day the one, true New Testament church that it produced in the days of the apostles, when no denominations existed.

YOUR CHURCH AND MINE

As I read the Sunday paper, I ran across this line,
 Today you go to your church, and I will go to mine.
 I've read the Bible over and over and never found that line:
 Today you go to your church, and I will go to mine.
 Upon this rock, I'll build MY Church, The Savior said one day.
 And before the dear Lord died, He humbly knelt to pray:
 May they be one, as we are one, those who believe on me.
 So the world may surely know I am loved, and sent by Thee.
 Yes, you may go to Your church, but let me tell you this

Your worship will be void and vain unless you go to HIS!

One True church of Christ: The Only 'church' in Heaven?

By Dale R. Larsen

(Condensed, edited, and arranged by Michael Shank for the Marion church of Christ website)

Nowhere in the New Testament is there a record of Roman Catholicism or **any** of the numerous Protestant denominations. How did the variety of present-day "churches" come into existence?

The church has always been composed of "people", vulnerable to human error. Paul warned the church at Corinth (1Cor. 1:10-13) not to follow men. In that very passage he asks, "Is Christ divided?" Division comes from humans and their views, and especially so when we look to men, rather than to the Bible, for our authority.

Christ's Church

Read the New Testament, and you will discover that Jesus has His church, and it still exists today. The pages of the New Testament reveal the following:

- Jesus prophesied that He would build His church (Matthew 16:18)
- Jesus said that the gates of Hades would not overcome it (Matthew 16:18)
- It was established miraculously on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36-47)
- God added the saved (those who repented of their sins and were baptized for the remission of their sins) to this church (Acts 2:47)
- The church was also called the 'body' (Colossians 1:18)
- Jesus is the 'Head' of this body (Colossians 1:18)
- There is only one body (Ephesians 4:4)
- The church of Jesus Christ met on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), worshipped God in songs and hymns (Ephesians 5:19), gave as they each were prospered (1 Corinthians 16:1-2), ate the communion supper together (Acts 20:7), followed the Bible example of prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17), and heard God's Word preached (Acts 20:27).
- The term "church of Christ" is a scriptural name designating the Lord's church (Romans 16:16), and is not a man-made, earthly denomination.

What is wrong with selecting a "church" of one's choice? As "free moral agents" we do have the capacity to choose, but our "choosing" can be wrong. In the case of the church, Christ built it, purchased it, and is its head. Those who respond to his invitation, on his terms, will be added to his church (Acts 2:41). Acts 2:47 states that the **Lord added** those that were being saved. Jesus is the author of eternal salvation "...unto all them that obey him" (Hebrews 5:9). He is the savior of the body, his church (Eph. 5:23). Proverbs 14:12 warns: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man; but the end thereof are the ways of death." Jesus himself said there would be those who professed the name of the Lord and who did works in his name, who would be lost. He said those who did the will of his Father who is in heaven would enter heaven (Matt. 7:21-23).

Catholicism

The Roman Catholic system of religion evolved as men departed from and altered the original pattern. Examples of such unauthorized additions are: holy water; penance; Latin mass; extreme unction and purgatory. These practices came too late to be apostolic or "original." Perhaps the greatest departure came in the area of organization, and over a period of a few hundred years the traditional Roman Catholic hierarchy emerged, about 606 A.D., with an unscriptural leader (pope) called Boniface III (Larsen, 1981).

Protestants

Protestants began as protestors. A denomination (of anything) is a division. Early leaders of Protestant movements were Catholics: Peter Waldo; Martin Luther; Ulrich Zwingli; etc. Their intention was to reform a church, which had become full of abuses and errors. Instead, many of these leaders were excommunicated and their efforts crystallized into new organizations. These were established too late to be the church of the New Testament, and they were founded by someone other than the one who spoke in Matthew 16:18. Many teachings and practices of Protestant denominations are additions to, or subtractions from, the New Testament pattern, and several are

retained from the Catholic church. Throughout the years still more denominations with new doctrines have continued to arise (Larsen, 1981).

What Does the Bible Say?

There is only one place to go for answers about the church. The Bible, the word of God, tells all about God's church, and it clearly presents one church! From the very first of the Bible, we find God's oneness stressed, and the unity of His followers taught. God is not a God of confusion (1Corinthians 14:33).

For further identification of that one church we look briefly to Old Testament prophecies: Both Isaiah and Micah speak of a special kingdom (future) and describe it as "the mountain of Jehovah's house" (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Micah 4:1,2).

These predictions designated the beginning place as Zion, or Jerusalem, and a message called "the word of Jehovah." Jesus said the Kingdom would come during his generation, and that it would come with power (Mark 9:1). The great Pentecost occasion recorded in Acts 2, fulfills all of these predictions, and from that time forward the New Testament speaks of the church as being in existence (Acts 2:46, 47; 20:28; 1 Cor. 16:19). Matthew 16:18, 19 and Acts 20:25-28 uses interchangeably the terms "kingdom" and "church." The first letter to Timothy (3:15) calls the church "the house of God."

So undenominational was that original church that it was sometimes spoken of simply as "the Way" (Acts 9:2). The basic meaning of the original Greek word for church was "the called out ones." The New Testament pictures one universal church with one common message: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the whole creation. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mark 16:15, 16). The members of this one body, or way, were scattered everywhere and as they met in their respective geographic locations they were called, in a local congregational sense, "churches of Christ" (Romans 16:16).