

The Supernatural Church

by A.B. Simpson

The church is a supernatural entity, a divine society founded on the Word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit, with a divine Head, a divine constitution, a supernatural life, a supernatural object, a supernatural support, and a supernatural destiny.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:25

Topics: "The Supernatural Church", "Divine Society"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the supernatural nature of the church, portraying it as a divine society bound by the love of Christ, who gave Himself for it. He highlights the church's identity as the body of Christ, its divine constitution, and the necessity of a supernatural life through the Holy Spirit for true membership. Simpson warns against the church's compromise with worldly influences and stresses its heavenly calling to worship, evangelize, and uphold the truth. He concludes with a vision of the church's glorious destiny, presenting it as a radiant bride to Christ, reflecting His beauty and glory.

Transcript

"Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5: 25-27.)

There is a social and collective element in our human life, and therefore Christianity involves not only a supernatural man but a divine society. Adam represented the race as a whole and Christ also has a people who are bound together by certain ties of life and fellowship and united under certain common characteristics as an organic whole.

Early in the story of the human race we find humanity divided into two great societies. One is called the sons and daughters of men developing in the family of Cain, the other the sons of God connected with the family of Seth.

Immediately after these two lines separate we find this remarkable statement in Genesis 4: 26, "Then began men to call upon the name of the Lord." More correctly this passage may be translated, "Then began men to call themselves by the name of the Lord." This was the organization of a divine society and it was organized with a divine name. They called themselves by the very name of the Lord as God's own special people.

In beautiful harmony with this we find in the early chapters of the New Testament that the society of believers also took a special name. This was the name of Christ. "The disciples were called Christians first in Antioch" and it has been happily suggested by one that this name was probably given not merely by the world around them but assumed by themselves as linking them more closely and directly with Christ. They were a divine society -- Christ ones, literally.

Now, the church of Jesus Christ is a divine society and there is no truth that has more need of emphasis in these days of compromise than the supernatural character and destiny of the church of the Lord Jesus. Christ Himself announced its heavenly character before He left the world, as, referring to His own divinity, He declared, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

In the later teachings of the Holy Ghost through the inspired apostles the doctrine of the church is unfolded with great fullness and the fundamental principles of this divine society are brought out with great clearness under the three striking figures of the building, the body and the bride.

The church has a divine Head. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." So intimately is He connected with it that in the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians, the great chapter of the church, it is even called by His very name, not the church of Christ, but Christ (1 Corinthians 12: 12). "As the body is one, and has many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ." He identifies Himself here with the church just as a man is identified with his own body. No human name is big enough to dominate the church. No single doctrine is important enough to give name and character to the church of Christ. Methods have their place but that place is not important enough to constitute a Methodist church. Baptism is very dear to every believer in his Bible but baptism is not near enough the center to justify the establishment of the Baptist church. Presbyterianism recognizes the equality of the ministry but even this is not of sufficient consequence to substitute for the name of Jesus the name of Presbyterian. Episcopacy recognizes the dignity of the bishop and the sacredness of the government of the church but an Episcopal church is a lower name than the dignity of Christ's church demands.

It is well for us to recognize in the life and fellowship of Christ all these sections of the circle but it would be much more to the honor of Christ if all were lost in His all-glorious name. He is the Head of the church. He alone should govern and control it. He alone should be its end and aim, its all in all.

The church has a divine constitution. "See . . . that you make all things according to the pattern shown to you in the mount" was the law of the ancient tabernacle and it applies to the church of which that tabernacle was the type.

Man cannot construct a church according to his theories and preferences. God has settled the question of its worship, ordinances and membership, and any society which claims to be a church and is not founded upon a regenerated membership, the inspiration of the Word and the supernatural presence, power and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, may be a Sunday Club or a literary Lyceum, but it is not the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The church has a supernatural life. We must be born into the church. We cannot be added to it. We are added to Him as the passage in Acts literally should be translated, and that adds us to the church.

"By one Spirit," or rather, "In one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." It is not only by the Holy

Ghost, but in the Holy Ghost that we are united to the church. A simple figure will illustrate the difference between the two propositions.

That ship in the sea is connected with the sea, but not part of it. They are distinct substances. But it is very different with that mighty river, the Hudson, which this moment is flowing into the sea and is now merged in the sea. The Hudson is part of the sea. It is blended with it; they are one.

That is the way we become members of the church. We partake of the common life of the body through the Holy Ghost.

This was brought out in the typical story of Eve's birth and marriage. She was made out of Adam with a common life, and then she was given back to Adam to be his bride.

So the church is born out of Christ's life, and then put back into Christ's arms as His beloved.

Nothing less than this supernatural life can ever constitute true membership in Christ's church. Sacraments will not do it. Subscriptions to the church funds will not do it. Official position will not do it. Imposition of hands and rites of ordination or confirmation will not do it. It is a heaven-born oneness -- a unity of life.

In the church at Ephesus there was a fine organization; there was a great deal of work. There was a great zeal for orthodoxy and a deliberate hunting down of heretics; but, notwithstanding all this, Christ was so grieved and even disgusted that He was about to remove the candlestick of Ephesus out of its place simply because they had left their first love and their life, as He literally expressed it respecting another of these churches, was "ready to die."

The church has a supernatural object. She is not an earthly kingdom, but a heavenly people. As truly as her Master can she say, "My kingdom is not of this world." What has she to do with vast endowments, social preeminence, parliaments of religion, mayoralty contests, political campaigns and royal patronage? It is hers to go up from the wilderness leaning upon the arm of her Beloved. It is the mark of the false, earthly, apostate church that she is seen sitting on the beast of earthly power, allied to the arm of flesh, and bearing as her seal the boastful legend, "She sits supreme over all the world."

The beginning of the great apostasy was the ambition of the first prelates and bishops of the early church to have the foremost place in the banquets of the Emperor, and that little strife about who should go in first to dinner or stand in the church was the beginning of the very papacy itself.

Alas! even in our democratic age the bribe of the world's favor and the popular applause of the multitude has proved as fatal to the church's purity and left her with Laodicea, which means to "please the people," basking in the smiles of the world, but standing on the very verge of the awful and impending judgment of her indignant and insulted Lord.

What are the great objects of the church of Christ? First, she must worship God and glorify her Father in heaven. Second, she must bear witness to the truth. She is called the pillar and crown of truth -- that is, as the pillar supports the archway with its inscription, so the church is called to uphold the great archway of revelation and hold before the world the testimony of God. And therefore her heavenly object is propagation, evangelization, to gather to her bosom the sinful world, to instruct and build them up in the life of Jesus, to be the training school for heaven and to give the gospel to all mankind. This is her heavenly calling. She is the only divine society on earth, the only institution that is essential, eternal and

will survive the wreck of time and the dissolution of the present age. Let us understand her high calling, and, oh, let her be true to it!

The church is endowed with supernatural powers. To her is given the baptism of the Holy Ghost. In her abides the living heart of Christ while the Head sits upon the mediatorial throne controlling all things for her good.

Christianity differs in this from all other systems. Each of them had a head, but the heart is cold in death. The heart of Christianity is the Holy Ghost living still in all the omnipotence of God in the bosom of the church and quickening her with her Master's risen life. It is He that uses her testimony to convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. It is He who clothes her messages with the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes. It is He who gives wisdom to her leaders and efficiency to her plans. It is His presence that separates her from all other societies, and makes this her distinguishing glory, as Moses said of Israel of old. Her object is not to lean on mighty intellects or large wealthy, powerful organizations, but upon the living God.

And He has clothed her with supernatural powers in the physical realm. When John sent to Jesus for the credentials of His ministry the answer given was, "Go your way, and tell John what things you have seen and heard; how that the blind see . . . the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached." These are still Christ's confirmatory signs for His true church. God forgive her for having so long surrendered them! God help her to reclaim them in these last days, to keep them in their true place and yet never to ignore them. They are like the jewels on Rebekah's robes, the earthly insignia of Isaac's love. Her robe is holiness; her jewels are the gifts of power.

Christ intended that His church should embrace all forms of ministry for all classes of need -- the sick, the orphan, the stranger, the poor, the ignorant, the lost. Oh, for the revival of apostolic and primitive church life! Oh, for the vision of the woman clothed with the sun, crowned with stars and the moon, the lower light of earth's midnight, under her feet!

The church has a supernatural support. The ascended Christ with all the resources of His providential government is her Head and Light, and as He sends her forth her all sufficient guarantee is this, "All power is given unto me . . . and, lo, I am with you always." As the bride of the Lamb and the co-heir of all His boundless wealth, what business has she to go about with her hat in her hand begging the petty pittance of their gifts from the brewers, distillers, gamblers and speculators of the earth, selling tickets for strawberry festivals, broom drills and indescribable follies of every kind and vainly competing with the literary lecture bureau or with the cheap theater for platform entertainments to draw the masses, and sometimes stoop even to the promiscuous dance to attract visitors to her Sunday school picnic or help out the deficiency in the preacher's salary. God convict her and God deliver her!

The church has a supernatural destiny. Her calling is to be the glorious church, and, some day, when He presents her to Himself not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, bright with all the glory of the Apocalyptic vision of the New Jerusalem, brightest of all with the reflected light and beauty of her Bridegroom and her Head, she will be the wonder of the universe; and they shall come from every star to gaze upon her while the attendant angels shall say, "Come hither, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife."

A beautiful old legend intimates that in the very center of man's first paradise was a temple of gems, where Adam worshiped God in the days of his unfallen innocence. Its floor was of shining gold and its walls were

of carbuncles, jaspers, rubies, emeralds and amethysts; its dome was a blazing diamond; but in the ruin of the fall that temple was torn to fragments and all the pieces scattered over the earth, and today we find them in little broken gems in the hearts of the mountains and in the depths of oceans. By and by, the legend tells us, in the age to come they are to be crystallized again into a yet more glorious temple, the vision of John, the New Jerusalem.

Well, whatever the legend amounts to, at least, we know that the children of God today are scattered, like jeweled fragments, in every race and clime, but they are gems of unparalleled preciousness and value. Next to Christ, the most precious thing on earth is Christ's people.

All our work here is but imperfect. Builders are like Solomon's workmen in the mountains, sending off one by one the stones and timbers but not seeing the building yet. The church shall rise in silent majesty as Solomon's temple rose, and as we look upon its stately splendor, its external foundations, its celestial towers, its glorious brightness, its supernal light, we shall not be sorry for the toils and tears we gladly gave and the song we often sang:

I love Your kingdom, Lord,

The house of Your abode,

The church our blessed Redeemer bought

With His own precious blood.

In conclusion, let us never dwarf the glorious conception of the church of Jesus by identifying it only, with our little sectarian conceptions. Let us love and cherish every branch of the true church of God, but let us rise above them all to the divine conception, and in all our fellowships, associations and alliances let us steadily hold that great communion of saints which is part of the Apostle's Creed and the eternal hope. It has been said: "We are not come outers. We are come uppers and go outers." Stripped of its colloquialism it just means, lift the church higher and carry the gospel further to a dying world, and so haste the day when He shall come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn ones who are written in heaven, to the New Jerusalem and innumerable company of angels, to God, the Judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect.

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