

Debate on the Meaning of the Church in Reformation Thought

by Greg Barrow

The sermon discusses the classical Protestant doctrine of the Church, emphasizing its existence without a visible appearance and its appearance marked by the pure preaching of God's Word and the lawful administration of the sacraments.

Duration: 1:24:09

Scripture: Jeremiah 32:17

Topics: "Ecclesiology", "Reformation Theology"

Description

In this video, Larry Berger introduces a quote from John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, where Calvin discusses the contrasting views of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism regarding the nature of the church. Berger believes that this quote is the best exposition of this doctrine ever written. He emphasizes the importance of this doctrine and its application to our walk with Jesus Christ. Berger also mentions another book, 'Covenanted Reformation Defended Against Contemporary Schismatics' by Greg Barrow, where Barrow argues against the three marks of the church and instead asserts that the profession of the true religion is the single defining mark of the visible Church.

Transcript

Our controversy with the Papists turns on these hinges. First, they contend that the form of the Church is always apparent and observable. Secondly, they set this form in the seat, that is, the seat of authority, of the Roman Church and its hierarchy.

We, on the contrary, affirm that the Church can exist without any visible appearance, and that its appearance, that is, when it is broadly visible to men, is not contained within that outward magnificence which they foolishly admire. Rather, it has quite another mark, namely, the pure preaching of God's Word and the lawful administration of the sacraments. They rage if the Church cannot always be pointed to with the finger.

But among the Jewish people, how often was it so deformed that no semblance of it remained? What form do we think it displayed when Elijah complained that he alone was left? How long after Christ's coming was it hidden without form? Hello, I'm Larry Berger. In this quote from the prefatory address to King Francis in his Institutes of the Christian Religion, the great reformer and systematizer of the faith, John

Calvin, sets forth clearly the classical Protestant doctrine of the Church. On this tape, you'll be hearing what I believe is the best exposition of this critical doctrine penned by any modern writer, and perhaps by any writer ever.

In the hopes of making your listening more profitable, and to enable you to see something of the vital nature of this teaching to the Christian religion, I'd like to demonstrate briefly the importance of this doctrine, and press home some applications of it to our walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. As we see in the above quote, Calvin is contrasting the views of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism concerning the nature of the Church. Charles Hodge, though he ought to be avoided in many areas, does a fine job of explaining this contrast.

He states, At the time of the Reformation, it was constantly urged against the Protestants that they were bound to obey the Church. To this they replied that the Church to which the obedience of the faithful is due was not the Romish or any other external organization, for they had all departed from the faith and taught for doctrines the commandments of men. To this the Romanists rejoined that if that were true, the Church had perished, for no organized visible society could be pointed out which professed the doctrines avowed by Protestants.

To this again the Reformers replied that the perpetuity of the Church, that is, the continual existence of the Church throughout all ages which Christ promised, which all parties admitted, did not require the continued existence of any such society. The Church might exist and at times had existed in scattered believers. Calvin says, and here Hodge gives the above quote from Calvin, Hodge goes on to say that, Calvin thus called this teaching one of the cardinal doctrines of Protestants, that the Church may be perpetuated in scattered believers, or in other words, that the apostasy of every visible organized society from the true faith is consistent with the perpetuity of the Church.

So why then is this cardinal doctrine of Protestantism so important? How does it practically affect our walk with Christ? Because confusion on this issue brings with it grave consequences which imperil our souls and undermine the unity and purity of Christ's Church. For example, consider the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 25, section 2, where it says that outside of the visible Church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. As we'll see, and as is clear from the context, the confession simply means that a profession of the Christian religion is necessary in order for there to be an ordinary possibility of salvation, and that this profession alone is what makes one a member of the visible Church.

Professing the Islamic religion, for instance, does not allow for such a possibility. Modern so-called Protestants, however, pervert the confession on this point, and thereby are dangerously close to promoting the damnable Roman error of substituting the organized visible Church as another mediator between God and man. The Roman Church, as Hodge alludes, asserts that outside of joining its organized visible society there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

Thus, Stephen Pribble, a minister in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, confusedly asserts in his essay, *Is Church Membership Optional?*, the following, quote, But certainly such a case is the exception rather than the rule. That is why the confession uses the word ordinary. Outside the Church there is no ordinary possibility of salvation, close quote.

I would therefore direct a word of brotherly rebuke to pastors and elders like Mr. Pribble, who clearly do not understand the teaching of the very confession of faith they vowed to uphold. Gentlemen, how can you regard yourselves faithful as overseers of Christ's flock when you are perjured in your ordination vows?

This very confession states that we are, quote, To avouch nothing but what we are fully persuaded is the truth, close quote, chapter 22, section 3. If you don't understand this and other confessional teachings, then you have sworn falsely. And if you do understand the true meaning of the confession on this matter, how can you remain in denominations where this cardinal doctrine of Protestantism is perverted and overthrown? Are you even bringing charges against those who teach thus falsely and who are themselves perjured? If not, why do you hypocritically insist that Christ's sheep should submit to you in the Lord, thereby submitting themselves to dangerous error? The chief shepherd, to the contrary, commands, quote, Cease, my son, to hear the instruction that causeth the heir from the words of knowledge, Proverbs 19.27. Christ's faithful sheep must not and will not sit under your teaching and oversight until such time as you show yourselves to be competent in your understanding and faithful in your application of true Protestant doctrine, instead of being those who rend the unity of the church with deadly errors.

Finally, then, I exhort all my brethren who are sitting under such leaders. It is true, as Mr. Pribble asserts, that joining ourselves to a faithful organized church, if one can be found, is not optional, Hebrews 13.17. It is equally true, and an unavoidable deduction from this biblical command, that refusing to join an unfaithful organized church is also not optional. If we sit ourselves under leadership who either do not understand the cardinal doctrines of Protestants, or, worse yet, who understand such doctrines but refuse to act accordingly, we are not putting ourselves in the path of Christ's blessings, but in the way of His judgments.

As He says, Let them alone, they be blind leaders of the blind, and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. Matthew 15.14 It is our responsibility to judge our leaders and their doctrine by the word of God, and to submit only to such as are found sound and faithful, for we are to submit ever and only in the Lord. God alone is the Lord of the conscience.

The Confession, Chapter 20, Section 2 Our kind Heavenly Father has preserved for us the faithful expositions of His word in the writings of our Protestant forefathers. Let us give careful heed, then, as Greg Barrow sets before us their scriptural teachings, to the end that both erring elders and flocks, as well as those who in obedience to Christ reject such dangerous leaders, may know the truth, that the truth may set us free. The classical Protestant doctrine of the Church, being Chapter 2 of Greg Barrow's book, The Covenanted Reformation Defended Against Contemporary Schismatics Misrepresentation No.

2 The Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton denounces true churches and maintains that they are the only duly constituted church upon the face of the earth. In his defense departed, Mr. Bacon asserts, The Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton's session do not believe themselves compelled to answer in any church court, for they have, in their exaggerated opinion, the only truly constituted church court to be found upon the face of the earth today. See Letter of Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton Clerk of Session and Brian Schwartley's warning.

And again, the error into which you have fallen is serious, and until you come out of the little group which claims that they alone, of all the inhabitants of the earth, have a true constitutional church, you will continue attached to the dead body of human tradition. Mr. Bacon's charges are scandalously unqualified. When one reads such unqualified statements as, They have, in their exaggerated opinion, the only truly constituted church court to be found upon the face of the earth today, or, until you come out of the little group which claims that they alone, of all the inhabitants of the earth, have a true constitutional church, often there is a very natural inclination to an intensely negative response.

This language represents us as thinking very highly of ourselves and very poorly of others, and is designed to lead the injudicious reader to substitute passion for reasoned judgment. Disaccomplished, it is then very unlikely that the reader will notice that the statements of Mr. Bacon are entirely unqualified. What does he mean by true constitutional court, or true constitutional church? Does he mean constitutionally true as to the being of the church, or constitutionally true as to the well-being of the church? Shouldn't he define what he means before publicly making such a serious accusation? Instead, he begins and ends his defense-departed without ever qualifying these terms.

He leaves it to the imagination and emotion of the reader to wonder whether the PRCE thinks they are the only Christian church on earth. These unqualified statements are a telling example of what Mr. Bacon has asked the public to digest. By not defining the terms in his accusations, he has asked his readers to swallow his unannounced assumptions with a certain degree of implicit faith.

Because of Mr. Bacon's serious disregard for these relevant qualifications, and because some may have been beguiled into believing this false report concerning us, I believe it would be most prudent to first inform the reader of our disposition toward those brethren who disagree with us. Following that, I will proceed with a direct response to these erroneous charges. Our Disposition Toward Those Who Disagree With Us On the 7th of May, 1741, the Mount Herrick Declaration was published after receiving sanction from the Correspondences and General Meeting of the United Societies.

The spirit of our covenanted brethren echoes our own sentiments and disposition toward those of our brethren who differ from us. We declare our esteem of and love for all the godly in these lands who have the root of the matter in them, and love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, who are studying godliness and have sad hearts for the tokens of God's sad displeasure, and the sins and abominations procuring the same, notwithstanding of their not being of the same sentiments and mind with us as to some parts of our testimony and practice. And that's cited from Matthew Hutcheson, the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland.

We have neither stated nor do we believe that those who profess the true religion and their children, the visible church universal, are only those who agree with us on every point of doctrine or practice. We do, however, fully concur with our confession of faith, which states, Saints by profession are bound to maintain an holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, and in performing such other spiritual services as tend to their mutual edification, as also in relieving each other in outward things according to their several abilities and necessities, which communion, as God offereth opportunity, is to be extended unto all those who, in every place, call upon the name of the Lord Jesus. That's the confession of faith, chapter 26, section 2. In the universal visible church, there are many true sons and daughters of God who have never even considered some of the questions we are now disputing.

We fully concur with Pastor David Steele when he says, Yes, unto them which believe, Christ is precious, and I never questioned that he is so to multitudes who never heard of the British covenants. But I grieve when these are lightly called the old covenants by those under the obligation of them. And that's from David Steele's Reminiscences.

We in the PRCE love all the brethren who will not obstinately and willfully speak or act contrary to the truth of God's word, with an approving love that is desirous of intimate Christian communion. We also love those who call themselves brethren, who willfully and obstinately speak or act contrary to the truly professed religion, with a love of benevolence that is desirous of their correction and restoration to the

truth. We love all men as they are created in God's image, with a love of benevolence, desiring their regeneration and conversion in Christ by the grace of God.

We have no desire to condemn the innocent or acquit the guilty, and so, according to God's holy will, we must make every attempt to speak the truth in love. While we endeavor to steer clear of indiscriminate censure of those guilty of defection, we at all times must pray for the resolve and perseverance to speak clearly against the sins of the day. Recognizing that all beloved believers have one and the same God and Father, we must also at the same time never become slack in distinguishing between truth and heresy in doctrine and faithfulness and defection in practice.

If, for the sake of peace, we are indifferent to heresy, or if, out of a false sense of love, we fail to correct the scandalous, we directly dishonor our Savior and suffer our neighbor to remain either ignorantly or obstinately in sin. It is simply because we love both our Savior and our brethren that we have adopted the position of our faithful forefathers, as it is agreeable to the alone, infallible standard of God's word. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart.

Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. I am the Lord.

Leviticus 19, 17 and 18 All saints that are united to Jesus Christ their Head, by His Spirit and by faith, have fellowship with Him in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory. And being united to one another in love, they have communion in each other's gifts and graces, and are obliged to the performance of such duties, public and private, as to conduce to their mutual good, both in the inward and outward man. That's the Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 26, section 1. This is the temper of earnest Christians who appreciate the gift of God in others.

When our brethren speak truly, act faithfully, and make righteous rulings, we rejoice in the truth. When a credible Christian profession is joined with faithful contending, we thank God for His mercy upon His children. Undeniably, Mr. Bacon's heated and unwarranted attacks have quenched the expression of love once shared by his congregation and ours, and it is my hope that a way can be found to overcome this obstacle.

We pray that God would bring to the remembrance of all contending parties that which we once enjoyed in each other, and that even through these disagreements, God would grant us the grace to hold out hope for reconciliation. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick, but when the desire cometh, it is a tree of life. Proverbs 13, 12 Though the PRCE is presently isolated from many independent congregations and denominations, though not from the Universal Visible Church, we long for the communion and fellowship that only true, like-minded Christian unity can produce.

We long for the day of reconciliation and agreement, a day when our present divisions will be healed and our protests will become unnecessary. Our prayer and our contending is for a covenanted Protestant unity of national Presbyterian churches who would work together to rule the Universal Visible Church of Christ in truth, and we believe that this cause is most consistent with the biblical love of our Triune God towards mankind. And it shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow unto it.

Isaiah 2, verse 2 I have set watchmen upon thy walls, O Jerusalem, which shall never hold their peace, day nor night. Ye that make mention of the Lord keep not silence, and give him no rest till he establish, until he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. Isaiah 62, verses 6 and 7 Please do not be fooled by Mr. Bacon's misrepresentations.

Our love for the brethren is both sincere and genuine. Please judge us according to our own words, and not according to the words and motives falsely imputed to us by Mr. Bacon and others. Having cleared our disposition toward others, I will now proceed directly to the issue at hand.

Does the PRCE denounce true churches and maintain that it is the only duly constituted church upon the face of the earth? Introductory Remarks Unless one is so naive as to think that every man who calls himself a minister is truly a minister of Christ, or that every group of people that call themselves a church is actually a true church, then one is left to discern which ministers and churches are true and which are false. Repeatedly, our Lord warned the church to beware of wolves in sheep's clothing and schismatic heretics who would come into the church of God to deceive the simple and to cause division. To testify openly against error is a moral and perpetual obligation binding upon all faithful churches and ministers.

In so doing, they are fulfilling their primary function as disciples of Christ by witnessing for the truth and contending against error. As one approaches this delicate topic, it becomes clear, even at the most early stages of investigation, that sweeping generalizations must give way to careful and precise distinctions. Seeing that the PRCE has been charged with denouncing true churches and claiming to be the world's only truly constituted church, an obvious question arises.

What does Mr. Bacon mean by true churches or truly constituted churches? What distinctions, if any, is he making when he uses these terms? Does he mean that we are denouncing true churches as to their essence or being, or does he mean we are denouncing true churches as to their well-being? Is he saying that we profess to be the only Christian church in the world, or is he charging us with something else? Mr. Bacon's only serious attempt at qualification appears when he quotes the 18th chapter of the 1560 Scottish Confession of Faith and one sentence from Samuel Rutherford's *The Due Right of Presbyteries*. He concludes from these two quotations that, Hereby, he implies that the PRCE's understanding of the true church differs significantly from that of Rutherford and the 1560 Scottish Confession of Faith. To clear up Mr. Bacon's ambiguity and error, I intend to prove from the above-mentioned quotation that Samuel Rutherford was talking about a true church as to its being, while the 1560 Scottish Confession of Faith was talking about a true church as to its well-being.

Next, I intend to prove that each of these sources, taken in their proper context, agree precisely with the doctrine of the PRCE. Please note carefully, Mr. Bacon's primary assumption and error is exhibited when he asserts that the church of Christ essentially considered is to be defined by three marks, that is, the true preaching of the word, the right administration of the sacraments, and ecclesiastical discipline uprightly administered. I contend that the true visible church of Christ essentially considered is to be defined by one single mark, that is, the profession of the true religion.

Much, therefore, depends upon who is correct in answering the following question. What marks are essential to the being of the visible church? When Mr. Bacon's error in answering this question is exposed, his one foundation stone concerning the visible church is removed, and his whole house of misrepresentations comes tumbling down. The doctrinal position of the PRCE regarding the being and the well-being of the church as it relates to the term true church.

One mark alone is sufficient to constitute an essentially true visible church, the profession of the true religion. We use this mark to distinguish between a Christian church and a non-Christian church. There is an important distinction to be made between the being, or esse, of a church and its well-being, bene esse.

Dear reader, please always keep this distinction in mind or you will fail to understand both the scriptures and the reformers and the men of the PRCE on this vital matter. What is necessary to the being of a true church is something considerably different from what is necessary to its well-being. Since the term true church can be applied to both its being and well-being, it is absolutely imperative to qualify which true church one is referring to, especially when making public charges.

Speaking of a true church as being essentially true tells us that a church is Christian, as opposed to pagan, while speaking of a true church relative to its well-being tells us whether a particular Christian church is being faithful to God's word. While the former distinguishes between the church and the world, the latter distinguishes between the faithful and the unfaithful churches among those bodies which profess Christianity. James Bannerman explains, Quote, We recognize this distinction every day in regard to a Christian man, and it is no less to be recognized in its application to Christian society.

There is many a doctrine and truth of revelation in regard to which a man may err without ceasing on that account to be a Christian man, and there may be many a duty recognized in Scripture as binding upon all in which he may be totally deficient without forfeiting his Christianity. In other words, there is much in doctrine and duty, in faith and practice necessary to the perfection of a believer which is not necessary to the existence of a believer as such, and so it is with a Christian church. What is essential to its existence as a church is something very different from what is essential to its perfection as a church.

This distinction is of considerable value and not difficult under the teaching of Scripture to be applied. We read in Scripture that the Christian church is the pillar and ground of the truth, and that for this cause the Son of God Himself came that He might bear witness to the truth. In other words, we learn that the very object for which the church of Christ was established on the earth was to declare and uphold the truth.

Judging then by this first test, we are warranted in saying that to hold and to preach the true faith or doctrine of Christ is the only sure and infallible note or mark of the Christian church because this is the one thing for the sake of which a church of Christ has been instituted on earth. A true faith makes a true church, and a corrupt faith a corrupt church, and should it at any time apostatize from the true faith altogether, it would by the very act cease to be a church of Christ in any sense at all. The church was established for the sake of the truth and not the truth for the sake of the church.

For this thing, then, the church of Christ was instituted, and this thing, or the declaration of the truth, must therefore be in its nature and importance paramount to the church itself. Again we read in Scripture that Christ gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. In other words, we learn that ordinances and office-bearers have been established for the object of promoting the well-being and edification of the church.

These things, then, that is, the ordinances and ministry, unlike the former, that is, the truth, were instituted for the sake of the church and not the church for the sake of them. And these things, that is, the ordinances and the ministry, therefore must be in their nature and importance subordinate to the church. And that's from the Church of Christ, Volume 1. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 25, Section 2, defines an essentially true church as having one mark, that is, the profession of the true religion.

The idea that there is one mark that alone distinguishes the being of a church from its well-being is clearly and plainly taught in the Westminster Confession of Faith, where it states, The visible church, which is also Catholic or universal under the gospel, not confined to one nation as before under the law, consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. That's the Confession, Chapter 25, Section 2. Likewise, the larger catechism, Question 62, questions, What is the visible church? Answer, The visible church is a society made up of all such as in all ages and places of the world do profess the true religion, and of their children. Notice that the only mark mentioned as necessary for the existence or being of a true visible church is the profession of the true religion.

According to the Westminster Divines, this is the single mark that distinguishes Christian churches from pagan churches. By using this mark, we can determine whether a body of people meeting together for worship are to be considered Christian in any sense. The Reformers, by applying this single mark to the Roman Catholic Church, called her a true church as to essence or being, and correctly distinguished her from the Turks or pagans.

For example, commenting on Jeremiah 15, verse 16, John Calvin writes, Quote, The name of God is indeed called indiscriminately on all who are deemed His people. As it was formerly given to the whole seed of Abraham, so it is at this day conferred on all who are consecrated to His name by holy baptism and who boast themselves to be Christians and the sons of the church, and this belongs even to the papists. That's from Calvin's commentaries.

Another excellent Reform scholar, Francis Turretin, defines the essentially true church, esse, as having one mark, that is, the profession of Christianity and gospel truth. Quote, The church of Rome can be regarded under a twofold view, either as it is Christian with regard to the profession of Christianity and of gospel truth which it retains, or papal with regard to subjection to the Pope and corruptions and capital errors in faith as well as morals, which she has mingled with and built upon those truths besides and contrary to the word of God. We can speak of it in different ways.

In the former respect, we do not deny that there is some truth in it, but in the latter, under which it is regarded here, we deny it can be called Christian and apostolic, but anti-Christian and apostate. And that's from Turretin's Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Volume 3. Here the church of Rome, which retains the single mark, a profession of gospel truth, is designated a true church when compared to pagans. Turretin, like Calvin, is saying that in the Roman Catholic Church there remains a possibility of salvation which is not true in a pagan group, and in this sense he is willing to call them a Christian church, a true church essential or a truly constituted church.

On the other hand, Turretin makes it clear that when he considers the Catholic Church as papal, he designates her a false church and anti-Christian. Notice here that by distinguishing between the being and well-being of the church of Rome, Turretin calls them a true church as to being and a false church as to well-being at the same time. It is significant to recognize this point which to some seems like a contradiction throughout the writings of the Reformers.

A true church can, at the same time, be considered true in one sense while false in another. In this case, Turretin is saying that though the Romish Church is essentially Christian, esse, it has strayed so far from its Christian foundation that it must be called false, bene esse. Samuel Rutherford defines the essentially

true church as having only one mark, that is, the profession of the truth and doctrine of godliness.

Quote, A visible profession of the truth and doctrine of godliness is that which essentially constitutes a visible church and every member of the visible church. And that's taken from Rutherford's due right of Presbyteries. To properly examine what Samuel Rutherford meant by this statement, we must do more than Mr. Bacon when he simply cites one quote and then boldly asserts that Rutherford agrees with him.

Mr. Bacon has asked us to believe that Rutherford is in total agreement with the 18th chapter of the Scottish Confession of Faith, while the so-called Stealites are in disagreement with both Rutherford and the Confession. I believe and will establish that Samuel Rutherford was in agreement with the 1560 Scottish Confession of Faith, but for very different reasons than Mr. Bacon sets forth. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that he has grossly erred regarding his doctrine of the church, primarily because he does not understand the reformer's distinction between the being and the well-being of the church.

Consequently, this particular error will be shown to be the foundation of the destructive misrepresentations set forth in his defense departed. Let's begin with what Rutherford and others do not mean when they teach that a visible profession of truth and doctrine of godliness is that which essentially constitutes a visible church. Number one, Rutherford shows that actual saving faith is not necessary to the essence or being of a true visible church.

Quote, That which is unseen is the form and essence of an invisible church, and that which is visible must be the essential form of a visible church. That's again from The Do-Right of Presbyteries. A second quote, And whereas our divines say that the church is invisible because faith which is the specific and constitutive form of the church is invisible, and known only to God, That's from Rutherford's survey of the survey of that sum of church discipline.

Two, Ministers, elders, and deacons are not necessary to the essence or being of a true visible church. In 1646, an anonymous work entitled *Just Divinum Regimenus Ecclesiasticae* or *The Divine Right of Church Government* was published. Its authorship is generally attributed to either Westminster divines themselves, likely the London Covenanted Presbyterians, or those who closely sympathized with them.

It is ironic that this book refutes its own publisher, Naftali Press, who also publishes Bacon's works, on this vital point, the very crux of the controversy. Quote, There are degrees of necessity. Some things are absolutely necessary to the being of a church as matter and form, that is, visible saints and a due profession of faith and obedience to Christ according to the gospel.

Thus, it is possible a church may be and yet want both deacons, elders, and pastors too, yea, and word and sacraments for a time. Some things are only respectively necessary to the well-being of a church. Thus, officers are necessary, yet some more than others, without which the church is lame, defective, and miserably imperfect.

That's from *The Divine Right of Church Government*. Three, Baptism and the Lord's Supper are not necessary to the essence or being of a true visible church. Quote, Abraham called with his house to leave idolatry, obeyed the calling, building an altar to the Lord, Genesis 12, 1-18, professes and teaches as a prophet the doctrine of the covenant, and God appearing revealed the gospel unto him, Genesis 12, 1-3, and Genesis 15, 4-7.

And so, he and his house are a visible church, when, not while, many years after, and until he was ninety and nine, the seal of circumcision was ordained and given to him in his house, Genesis 17, verses 1-3. And that is from Samuel Rutherford's survey of the survey of that sum of church discipline. And again, another Rutherford quote, And the church is a true visible church in the wilderness, which yet wanted, that is, lacked, circumcision and the Passover forty years in the wilderness.

Joshua 5, verses 5-7. This proves that there is a true visible church where Christ is and yet wanteth the ordinary seals baptism and the Lord's Supper. Again, from survey of the survey.

4. Church discipline is not necessary to the essence or being of a true visible church. Quote, But a church may retain the essence and being of a visible church and yet have no discipline in actual use or little and though want, that is, lack of discipline, do leaven a church, yet it does not, as Robinson says, evert the nature thereof and turn it into Babylon and a den of dragons. That's from the do-right of Presbyteries.

To summarize, Rutherford and others do not make actual saving faith, ministry, sacraments, or church discipline necessary to the existence of a true church essentially considered. Why? Because saving faith is the essence of the essence of the invisible church and does not pertain to the definition of the true visible church and because ministry, sacraments, and discipline, while necessary and profitable for the well-being of the church, are not necessary to its existence or being. Seeing that Rutherford removes all of these things from his definition of an essentially true church, what is left to include? One mark and one mark alone is necessary to the definition of a true church, *essa*, that is, Rutherford's profession of the truth.

Quote, A visible profession of the truth and doctrine of godliness is that which essentially constitutes a visible church and every member of the visible church, from the do-right of presbyteries. Again, quote, truth of doctrine concurs to give being to the church and to the constitution of it, from Rutherford's do-right of presbyteries. Quote again, any sort of profession, whether by an avowing of that gospel to one another or suffering for it, even when the shepherds are smitten and the flock is scattered, is a very practical and speaking mark that such a company is a true church, from Rutherford's survey of the survey.

And finally, again, from survey of the survey, and yet, if these may be, to wit, hearing and profess receiving, here is an essential mark by which persons before they receive seals are made members and visible disciples and societies visible and churches essentially differenced. One, essentially differenced from all the false churches visible upon the earth who have not the sound of the word preached and professedly heard and visibly received, and two, from all civil societies, three, from all pagan and heathen societies on earth. Therefore, they were a distinct Christian society, differenced essentially, and if they should all die before they had been baptized or had received the seals, they have been true visible disciples and if killed for the truth, they had died visible professing martyrs and the called Church of Christ.

It is to be carefully observed that like James Bannerman, the Westminster Divines, and Francis Turretin, Samuel Rutherford also taught the distinction between the being and the well-being of a true church. By one single mark, he distinguishes the true church from false churches who have no profession of the truth, from all civil societies, and from all pagan societies on earth. We can now confidently affirm that Rutherford's definition of the essentially true church is exceedingly broad.

By his definition, there are many true churches upon the earth. Samuel Rutherford was simply saying that one mark was necessary to distinguish an essentially true church from a pagan church, which is precisely what the PRCE is saying. Strictly speaking, all that Scripture requires to constitute, *esse*, a visible church,

is the mark of the truth, that is, possession of the true doctrine of Christ, and enough of the fundamentals of the true Christian religion to warrant a possibility of salvation.

This is the minimal standard necessary for a church to qualify as a true church as opposed to a pagan church. To illustrate this in practical terms, let us consider how Rutherford applies his definition to the Roman Catholic Church. Speaking of the reason why the Reformers still consider the baptism of Rome to be valid, and therefore not to be repeated in a Protestant church, Rutherford states, quote, because there, that is, those in Rome who received an invalid baptism by a midwife or a private person, because their profession of that covenant whereof baptism is a seal separates them sufficiently from infidels, though they want or lack the seal external.

That's from the *Due Right of Presbyteries*. Notice that Rutherford says that even those in Rome who receive an invalid baptism by a midwife or a private person do profess the true covenant in such a way as to separate them from infidels and pagans. This is precisely the purpose of distinguishing between the being and the well-being of the church.

If we say that we receive the baptism of Rome, then we must essentially receive the ministry of Rome, which administers the baptism. This is exactly what Rutherford concludes when he says, quote, these have a ministry essentially entire who have power under Christ to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments, Matthew 28, 19. The Romish priests have this and are called to this by the church.

That's from the *Due Right of Presbyteries*. John Robinson, Rutherford's independent opponent from New England, objects, quote, how could England forsake the church of Rome and forsake the ministry within the church, as in the subject, especially seeing you teach that a true ministry makes a true church? That was Rutherford citing him in the *Due Right of Presbyteries*. And Rutherford responds, England may well separate from Rome, everting the fundamental parts of faith, and not separate from Rome's baptism or ministry in so far as they essentially be the ordinances of Christ.

Rutherford is applying his doctrine exactly the same way as Turretin, Calvin, and the divines of the Westminster Assembly. He teaches that one may lawfully separate from a church that is essentially true as to being when it is deformed as to its well-being. The reformers did not profess separation from the true remnant of Rome, which professes the true gospel, but from the papal part of Rome that destroys the fundamentals of the truth.

Though the ministerial church of Rome still retained an essentially true ministry and valid baptism, the papal tyranny inseparably attached to it was like a malignant tumor, and these reformers understood that this true church, esse, was something to denounce and avoid, lest they die amidst her corruption. Is this not exactly what John Calvin is teaching when he says, quote, However, when we categorically deny to the papists the title of the church, we do not for this reason impugn the existence of churches among them. Rather, we are only contending about the true and lawful constitution of the church required in the communion not only of the sacraments, which are signs of profession, but also, especially, of doctrine.

That's from Calvin's *Institutes*. Mr. Bacon whines and complains that the PRCE has, quote, used their forum to denounce true churches and ministers of Christ. As I have demonstrated, both the Church of Rome and its ministry are considered true as to essence by Calvin, Turretin, and Rutherford, yet they counsel separation from both, warning others to avoid their poison.

Does Mr. Bacon also say that Calvin, Turretin, and Rutherford were using their forum to denounce true churches and ministers when they taught separation from Rome? If not, then how is he justified in making such an accusation about the PRCE for saying that the Presbyterian Church in America, the PCA, or the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the OPC, or Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, though true churches as to essence, are to be avoided and denounced? My point is that the validity of Mr. Bacon's charge entirely depends upon the meaning he attaches to the phrase true church. Without making the distinction between the being and the well-being of the church, his charges are meaningless and entirely ambiguous. As it stands, these meaningless charges are a source of mischief and stumbling for Christ's little ones, who until now were likely unaware of these critical distinctions.

If Mr. Bacon was aware of these distinctions, I conclude that he was negligent and culpable for not using them. If he was ignorant of these distinctions, then he must repent for slandering us in his ignorance. He is trapped between a rock and a hard place with nowhere to turn.

Is Mr. Bacon ready to admit that his charges are entirely unqualified and misleading? There is no excuse for his making public charges of this nature leading others astray without carefully qualifying what he means. The Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton, P.R.C.E., unequivocally states that there are many truly constituted churches essentially considered in the world. I have shown by this first distinction that one mark alone is sufficient to constitute an essentially true visible church, that is, the profession of the true religion.

This single mark is used to designate a Christian church from a pagan church. The P.R.C.E. unequivocally states that the one remaining church calling itself the Presbytery of the Reformation Presbyterian Church, that is, Bacon's Church, is a truly constituted visible church as to essence or being, as are particular Roman Catholic, Arminian, or Baptist churches. This applies equally to any other particular church who essentially retains the profession of the truth.

Mr. Bacon's unqualified libel that the P.R.C.E. thinks it is the only truly constituted church in the world has led many to believe that we are denominating all other Christian churches except ourselves as non-Christian. This is absolutely false and we can hardly fathom how Mr. Bacon would dare utter such unqualified folly. Now that we have exposed Mr. Bacon's slander, we shall see if he responds with repentance or with simply more false rhetoric.

Let him demonstrate from anything we have written or spoken that we have condemned every body of Christians but ourselves as non-Christian or let him be ashamed. To date, he has simply acted mischievously and irresponsibly by publicly making unqualified accusations invented by an offended imagination. And then quoting from James Rennick's informatory vindication, we judge schismatic and pragmatic dividers of the Church and wideners of the breaches thereof already broken and divided and those who sow discord among brethren and promote their contentions by invidious reproaches or other ways are to be withdrawn from.

Next, I would like to continue to prove that Mr. Bacon is entirely wrong in his assertion that Samuel Rutherford, who stated in his classic work entitled *The Do-Right of Presbyteries*, that, quote, a visible profession of the truth and doctrine of godliness is that which essentially constitutes a visible Church and every member of the visible Church, was talking about the same thing as the 18th chapter of the 1560 Scottish Confession of Faith. Those things commonly called the notes or marks of the Church, that is, the true preaching of the word, the right administration of the sacraments, and ecclesiastical discipline

uprightly administered, pertain to the well-being of the Church or the perfecting of the saints. By these notes we distinguish between a truly constituted visible Church being and a true Church faithfully adhering to its lawful constitution, well-being.

We must distinguish between the things for which the Church was instituted and the things that have been instituted for the Church. James Bannerman explains, quote, In the second place, what are those things which, unlike the truth, have been instituted for the sake of the Church and not the Church for the sake of them? Such unquestionably are those ordinances, office-bearers, and discipline which have been established within the Christian society. These being instituted for the advantage and edification of the Church are, from their very nature, subordinate and secondary to the truth for the holding and publication of which both they and the Church itself exist.

They may be necessary and are necessary for the perfection of the Church, but they are not necessary for its existence. That's the Church of Christ, volume one. And again, quoting Bannerman, But join to the possession of the true faith the administration of the outward ordinances as necessary to constitute a Christian Church, and you assign to outward ordinances a rank and value which are not justly theirs, and make them primary and not, as they truly are, of secondary importance.

Again, from volume one. The Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter twenty-five, section three, distinguishes that which is essential from that which is given for the well-being of the Church. The Westminster Confession of Faith, twenty-five, three, states, Quote, Unto this Catholic invisible Church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life to the end of the world, and doth by his own presence and spirit, according to his promise, make them effectual thereunto.

That the ministry, oracles, and ordinances are not necessary to the being of the Church is clearly spelled out for us when the Confession says that these things were given unto the Church for the perfecting of the saints. That which is given unto the Church for its perfection cannot be said to constitute its existence. Ministry, oracles, and ordinances are not things that essentially distinguish Christians from pagans, but rather these are the marks that essentially distinguish one Christian assembly from another.

Rather than distinguishing Christian churches from non-Christian churches, this distinction allows us to differentiate between faithful true churches, esse, and unfaithful true churches, esse. The Church of Scotland, 1638-1649, serves as an example of the former and is to be distinguished from the Church of Rome or the Reformed and Presbyterian Daughters of the Revolution Church, who serve as examples of the latter. Though he has given these distinctions some lip service in the past, see The Visible Church in the Outer Darkness, page 5, it is evident that Mr. Bacon does not understand how to apply these necessary distinctions.

This is proved by the fact that the marks of the Church in the 1560 Scottish Confession of Faith and the words of Samuel Rutherford as cited in Defense Departed are misrepresented and misunderstood by Mr. Bacon. The 1560 Scottish Confession of Faith speaks of the well-being of the Church when it says, quote, The notes, therefore, of the true Kirk of God we believe, confess, and avow to be, first, the true preaching of the word of God into the which God has revealed Himself to us as the writings of the prophets and apostles do declare, secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, which must be annexed unto the word and promise of God to seal and confirm the same in our hearts, last, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered as God's word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished.

Wheresoever, then, these former notes are seen and of any time continue, be the number, that is, of persons, never so few, about two or three, there, without all doubt, is the true Kirk of Christ, who, according to His promise, is in the midst of them, not that universal, that is, Kirk, of which we have before spoken, but particular Kirks, such as were in Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, and other places, in which the ministry was planted by Paul and were of himself named the Kirks of God." Notice here that the 1560 Scottish Confession of Faith uses a more general definition of the true church, and one that could only be applicable when defining the true church as to its well-being and not to its being.

This is evident by the fact that the Scots of 1560 included the ministry, ordinances, and discipline in their definition of the true church. As we have already seen, these are things given for the perfecting of the church and not for the existence of the church. The 18th chapter of the Scottish Confession was speaking of the same thing as Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 25, section 3, where it says, Christ hath given the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God for the gathering and perfecting of the saints.

It was not at all describing the essence of the true church described in Westminster Confession of Faith, 25, 2, but rather was contrasting a faithful church which ought to be joined to an unfaithful church which must be avoided. The Scots of 1560 were making a correct distinction between a true church being and a faithful church well-being, legitimately and pastorally warning God's people to separate from the corruption within the visible church. If the reader will take the time to read the 18th chapter of the 1560 Scottish Confession with these distinctions in mind, he will easily see that the three marks of the church never pertain to the church's essence and always pertain to the well-being of the true church of Christ.

If the three marks do pertain to the essence of the church, as Mr. Bacon would seem to believe, then why did the Spirit of God call the wandering Jews, who were without the sacrament of circumcision for forty years, a church in the wilderness? Acts 7.38 This is he that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the Mount Sinai and with our fathers who received the lively oracles to give unto us. We are assured from Scripture that circumcision was not administered to this church in the wilderness by the following account in the book of Joshua. And this is the cause why Joshua did circumcise all the people that came out of Egypt that were males, even all the men of war, died in the wilderness by the way after they came out of Egypt.

Now all the people that came out were circumcised, but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised. For the children of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness till all the people that were men of war which came out of Egypt were consumed because they obeyed not the voice of the Lord, unto whom the Lord sware that he would not show them the land which the Lord sware unto their fathers that he would give us, a land that floweth with milk and honey. And their children whom he raised up in their stead, them Joshua circumcised, for they were uncircumcised because they had not circumcised them by the way.

Joshua chapter 5 verses 4 through 7. Therefore we may safely conclude that, according to Scripture, circumcision is not essential to the definition of a true church, esseh. This unequivocally proves that the 1560 Scottish Confession of Faith could not have been referring to the essence of the church when it defined the church as having three marks. Baptism, the second mark, like circumcision, is given for the perfecting of the saints and is not essential to the definition of a true church, esseh.

Unless Mr. Bacon wishes to assert that the Church of Scotland, 1560, was wrong about what it wrote in the 18th chapter of its confession, he must admit that they were talking about the well-being of the church

and not its being. Next, consider again Mr. Bacon's comments when he says, quote, Rutherford did not leave us to guess if he understood the true church as the 1560 Scots Confession understood it or if he agreed with the Steelites. Close quote.

That's from Defense Departed. How could Mr. Bacon assert that Samuel Rutherford and the 1560 Scottish Confession were saying the same thing when, as I have demonstrated, they were not even talking about the same subject? The 18th chapter of the 1560 Scottish Confession used the definition distinguishing a faithful church from an unfaithful church to practically warn and instruct the people of God to avoid communion with the church of Antichrist. They knew that, strictly speaking, the ministry, ordinances, and discipline were not necessary to the being of a church.

On the other hand, as I have already demonstrated, Samuel Rutherford, in the passage cited by Mr. Bacon in his Defense Departed, was speaking only about the being of the church. Mr. Bacon apparently does not recognize the distinction between the well-being of the church spoken of in the 1560 Scottish Confession and the being of the church spoken of by Samuel Rutherford in his Due Right of Presbyteries, this lack of understanding which is magnified when he further asserts that the so-called Steelites disagree with both Rutherford and the 1560 Scottish Confession. The PRC agrees with both Samuel Rutherford and the 1560 Scottish Confession, while Mr. Bacon misrepresents all parties involved.

The PRC agrees with Rutherford that one mark alone is sufficient to constitute a true visible church as the being that is a visible profession of the truth. The PRC also agrees with the 1560 Scottish Confession when they say that the three notes that pertain to the well-being of the church are the true preaching of the word, the right administration of the sacraments, and ecclesiastical discipline uprightly administered. In this case, Mr. Bacon's unqualified libel has misstated the doctrine of Rutherford, the 1560 Scottish Confession, and the PRC-E.

In his attempt to expose the alleged error of the PRC-E, Mr. Bacon has again exposed himself to shame. Mr. Bacon is correct in this much, at least. Rutherford did leave no doubt whether or not he agrees with the doctrine of the Puritan Reformed Church.

He agrees with us perfectly. That is, we agree perfectly in the truth. Thus far, I have demonstrated that the Puritan Reformed Church calls many churches on earth truly constituted churches, as to being, contrary to Mr. Bacon's slanderous misrepresentation that we think we are the only Christian church on earth.

I have also shown that Mr. Bacon does not appear to understand the distinction between the being and the well-being of the church. If he claims that he understands this distinction, his crime is aggravated, for then we must ask why he didn't mention it in his accusations. Why did he purposely mislead others to believe that the PRCE thought they were the world's only Christian church, if he knew that we considered many other churches to be essentially true? If he admits his ignorance of these important distinctions, he needs to publicly repent for making such serious public misrepresentations of our beliefs.

Either way, he needs to repent. We must distinguish between the true church being and the true church well-being to fulfill our moral duty to God. John Anderson writes Quote I have already mentioned the important distinction between a true church that is being and a pure church that is well-being.

A church may retain the principle doctrines and ordinances of the Christian religion in her profession in such a measure that she may be called a true church and yet she may, as an ecclesiastical body, have such errors in doctrine, such human inventions as integral parts of her worship, such unscriptural officers

and usages in her government, or may be chargeable from such defection from reformation formerly attained, that we cannot be faithful to the cause of Christ, which in these respects is opposed, nor to the Catholic, that is, universal church, for whose true interest we are bound to use our best endeavors, nor to the souls of men, which are deeply injured by such evils, without withdrawing from her communion. A particular church in this case, though she ceases to be a pure church, may still be called a true church of Christ on account of the measure in which she retains the profession of his truth and ordinances. That's from John Anderson's Alexander and Rufus.

John Calvin uses the same reasoning when speaking of the Roman Catholic church of his day. He distinguished between a true church, *esse*, and the faithful church, *bene esse*, which one ought to join or in which one should remain. He demonstrates that it is a fundamental principle of Protestantism to separate from a true church, *esse*, to go to a true church, as to well-being, when staying in a true but corrupt church prevents us from fulfilling our duty to God or conversely causes us to sin.

Quote, However, when we categorically deny to the papists the title of the church, that is, as to its well-being, we do not for this reason impugn the existence of churches among them, that is, as to their being. Rather, we are only contending about the true and lawful constitution of the church required in the communion not only of the sacraments, which are signs of profession, but also especially of doctrine. Again, that's from Calvin's Institutes.

Another quote from Calvin. In the same way, if anyone recognizes the present congregations contaminated with idolatry, superstition, and ungodly doctrine as churches in full communion of which a Christian man must stand even to the point of agreeing in doctrine, he will gravely err, for if they are churches, the power of the keys is in their hands, but the keys have an indissoluble bond with the Word, which has been destroyed among them. Again, if they are churches, Christ's promise prevails among them, whatever you bind, and so forth.

That's Matthew 16, 19, 18, 18, and John 23, 20. But on the contrary, they disown from their communion all that genuinely profess themselves servants of Christ. Accordingly, either Christ's promise is vain, or they are not, at least in this regard, churches.

Finally, instead of the ministry of the Word, they have schools of ungodliness in a sink of all kinds of errors. Consequently, by this reckoning, either they are not churches, or no mark will remain to distinguish the lawful congregation of believers from the assemblies of the Turks. And that's again from the Institutes.

Speaking of the Romish Antichrist, he says, quote, Daniel, Daniel 9, 27, and Paul, 2 Thessalonians 2, 4, foretold that Antichrist would sit in the temple of God. With us, it is the Roman pontiff we make the leader and standard-bearer of that wicked and abominable kingdom. The fact that his seat is placed in the temple of God signifies that his reign was not such as to wipe out either the name of Christ or of the church.

From this, it therefore is evident that we by no means deny that the churches under his tyranny remain churches. And that's from the Institutes. Finally, Calvin states, quote, To sum up, I call them churches, that is, *esse*, to the extent that the Lord wonderfully preserves in them a remnant of his people, however woefully dispersed and scattered, and to the extent that some marks, or vestiges, of the church remain, especially those marks, like baptism, whose effectiveness neither the devil's wiles nor human depravity can destroy.

But on the other hand, because in them those marks have been erased to which we should pay particular regard in this discourse, I say that every one of their congregations and their whole body lack the lawful form of the church, that is, bene esse. And again, that's from the Institutes, and that is the concluding section of Calvin's treatment on that in Book 4, Chapter 2. Note that Calvin is calling particular churches within the Roman Catholic Church true, as to essence, while at the same time calling them false because they lack a true and lawful constitution. He states that the true and lawful constitution of the church is required in the communion of the sacraments as well as the doctrine.

The fact that he mentions their true and lawful communion in relation to the sacraments is significant to our present dispute with Mr. Bacon. Here Calvin is using this phrase, true and lawfully constituted, in exactly the same sense as the PRCE did when we dissociated from the Reformation Presbyterian Church. Like John Calvin, Rutherford, and Turretin, we were not contending that the individual churches of the pretended Presbytery of the Reformation Presbyterian Church did not exist as Christian churches relative to pagans.

Rather, we were contending about the true and lawful constitution of the church which the Reformation Presbyterian Church required in her terms of communion. In the 23 times we used the phrase, truly constituted church, in our letter of dissociation we never once used it in such a way as to denote the essence or being of the church. We were not arguing about whether the bodies in the Reformation Presbyterian Church were Christian or pagan, only whether these bodies lacked a true and lawful constitution as they applied their doctrine to the ministry, ordinances, and discipline.

We were simply saying that their terms of communion were inconsistent with our duties and obligations before God, and that we could not in good conscience comply with them. Consequently, we believed that our differences with the Reformation Presbyterian Church were so fundamental that we could not continue to be ecclesiastically associated with them. Again, I cite John Anderson.

Quote, If there be no lawful refusing of sacramental communion with a particular church, then there can be no lawful separation from it till it be unchurched. But the latter is absurd and therefore the former. I think it manifestly absurd to say that we are not to separate from a particular church, however degenerate and corrupt in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government, till it is no church of Christ at all.

For this would be to suppose that, though Christ has provided the centers of the church as a means of preserving her from the danger arising from the offenses of one or a few members, He has provided no means of her preservation from the far greater danger of utter ruin by the prevailing influence of a corrupt majority. When such a majority is found incorrigibly obstinate in their opposition to any steps towards a thorough reformation, it is evident that there is no remedy but secession. By such a majority, one great end of church communion, which is that the truths and institutions of the Lord Jesus may be preserved pure and entire, is avowedly and obstinately opposed.

And therefore, in this case, the Lord Jesus is saying to His people, as in 2 Corinthians 6.17, Come out from among them and be ye separate. Many of us many limits such calls to our departure from the communion of pagans and papists, but they are applicable to our secession from any prevailing party, even though they should bear the name of Christians, of Protestants and Presbyterians, who, in their united capacity or as a professing body, are going on in obstinate opposition to any of the truths and institutions of Jesus Christ, so that none can continue in their church communion without being involved in the guilt of that opposition. From such combinations, Christ is calling His people to separate.

It is not meant, however, that degenerate Protestants and Presbyterians are upon a level with heathens and papists, for there may be a just cause of separation from the former, though not so great as from the latter. We have now clearly established that Mr. Bacon has publicly shamed himself by making sinfully unqualified charges. One more thing needs to be discussed before we go on to the next misrepresentation.

What is Mr. Bacon really saying about all other churches when he attempts to form a new presbytery instead of joining an already existing one? The member churches and ministers of the Reformation Presbyterian Church came from various denominations, but primarily they separated from the Presbyterian Church in America, that is, the PCA. Mr. Bacon played a large part in getting these ministers and elders together to talk about uniting into a presbytery. At the first meeting, Mr. Bacon asked a very good question for which no one in the room had an adequate answer.

What reason did this group of men have to form yet another Presbyterian denomination distinct from all the rest? That question forms the basis for one of our greatest objections to the Reformation Presbyterian Church's pretended presbytery. What did the Reformation Presbyterian Church really say about the other denominations and congregations in the world when they formed yet another distinct and rival denomination? Given his view of the nature of the Church, Mr. Bacon practically asserts the pretended presbytery of the Reformation Presbyterian Church to be the only truly constituted, as to well-being, church court in the world. Does the Reformation Presbyterian Church presbytery regard the church courts of the Presbyterian Church in America, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, or any other denomination as having jurisdiction over them? Is the RPC officially in union with any church court in the world? If they are, then why didn't they acknowledge such a union at their inception? Does the Reformation Presbyterian Church claim to follow all the contradictory acts of the present-day General Assemblies? From where did the churches of the Reformation Presbyterian Church come? Did not the Reformation Presbyterian Church gather her churches from other true churches? How is this consistent with Mr. Bacon's book entitled *The Visible Church in the Outer Darkness*? The fundamental principle of government in each distinct Presbyterian denomination in the United States and Canada is really no different than that of the independent congregations Mr. Bacon calls separatist.

By forming a distinct and independent denomination, Mr. Bacon and the Reformation Presbyterian Church are testifying that they could not find one group in all the world with whom they could in good conscience unite. This confused ecclesiology is no different in theory than the doctrine of the independence, only it is being practiced in forming denominations rather than congregations. Thus we designated independent denominationalism.

The Reformation Presbyterian Church and the other distinct and independent Presbyterian denominations have put Presbyterian window-dressing upon an essentially independent concept of the church government. You have your church court and I'll have mine is the motto of the churches in North America and around the world. John Anderson writes, quote, *The Catholic Church comprehends all that profess the true religion.*

There is a lawful and necessary division of it into sections in respect of local situation, but when a number of people bearing the Christian name combine together as a distinct society for the purpose of maintaining and propagating doctrines and practices which instead of belonging to the true religion are contrary to it they ought not considered as such a combination to be called a lawful section of the Catholic Church. It is not denied that they belong to the Catholic Church but it is denied that there ought to be any such section

or division in it. Thus there ought to be no section of the Catholic Church having for the peculiar end of its distinct subsistence the support of Episcopal hierarchy unknown in the Scripture of the propagation of anti-pedo-baptism or of anti-scriptural doctrines in opposition to that of God's election, redemption, effectual calling and the conservation of His people as delivered in the Scripture or for the support of ways and means of divine worship not found in Scripture.

If the Catholic Visible Church were brought to a suitable discharge of her duty she would abolish all such sections. But no society ought to be called such an unlawful section while it can be shown that it subsists as a separate society for no other end than for the maintaining of something in the doctrine, worship or government of the Church which belongs to the Christian religion as delivered in the word of God or for exhibiting a testimony against prevailing errors and corruptions which the Scripture requires the Catholic Church to condemn. Such a profession of any party of Christians is no sectarian profession and a union with them is not a sectarian but properly a Christian union and being cordial and sincere is a union in Christ and communion upon the ground of this union is truly Christian communion.

On the other hand however much of our holy religion any body of Christians hold in common with others and however many of them we may charitably judge to be saints yet while their distinguishing profession is contrary to the word of God communion with them as a body so distinguished is sectarian communion as it implies a union with them in that which ought to be rejected by the whole Catholic Church. That again is from Alexander and Rufus. Where does the Bible teach that each nation is supposed to have numerous independent and rival church courts all claiming to be Presbyterian? The word of God teaches the exact opposite.

The Westminster Standards teach the exact opposite. The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland 1638 to 1649 certainly did not believe in the independent denominationalism of Mr. Bacon and the Reformation Presbyterian Church. Instead the Westminster Divines taught and practiced in agreement with Scripture that each nation was to have one national church covenanted together in unity of doctrine and uniformity of practice.

They not only taught and practiced it but God blessed them with victory in three nations albeit for a very short time. This idea of covenanted unity and uniformity is the only possible way for the independent Presbyterians of recent years to extract themselves from a palpable dilemma. While they preach Presbyterianism from the pulpits they practice independency in their church courts.

Mr. Bacon's false and scandalous charge that the PRCE thinks it is the only duly constituted church court in the whole world rings hollow in our ears when coming from his mouth. Who does he think he's fooling when he will not join with any other group on earth and then solves his dilemma by pretending to form yet another rival independent Presbyterian church court in the United States? Who does he think he's fooling when he boldly and unqualifiedly proclaims that the PRCE thinks they are the only truly constituted church court? If his sin were not so serious it would border upon the humorous and absurd, especially considering that he cannot see how he is condemning his own actions. Let him soberly consider that he has charged us with precisely the same thing he is doing and in the process caused much mischief and division.

May Mr. Bacon sincerely repent of his hypocrisy and double standard. The Reformation Presbyterian church in its pretended court is presently nothing more than another independent schism in the body of Christ. Quote, We are expressly commanded to note such schismatics and mark such causes of divisions and offenses which they effectuate both by their practice and by their words, crying up their own party and

informing against the more pure and faithful remnant.

That's from James Rennick's *Informatory Vindication*. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye meet, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thine brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye, and behold, the beam is in thine own eye.

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye. Matthew 7, verses 2-5 Now the reader may object and ask what is different about what the PRCE is doing? Have they not practically done the same thing? Have they not set up a church court distinct from all the rest? No, just the opposite. We have separated from all the existing schisms of the present day and returned to the original covenanted constitution of the Church of Scotland.

We own their constitution and are bound by the acts of their General Assembly 1638-1649 because they are agreeable to God's word and because they are undeniably noble examples of the purest and highest attainment of the Church of Jesus Christ thus far. Contrary to Mr. Bacon's charge that we do not believe ourselves compelled to answer in any church court, we abide by and enforce the rulings of their church courts as they are agreeable to God's word, and we also understand this is part of the formal and moral obligation of the solemn league and covenant. We have not separated ourselves into independency like Mr. Bacon, who by his separatist practice owns no church court but his own, but instead have returned to the Presbyterian polity which we have sworn to uphold in the covenants of our forefathers.

Let the reader judge if we have not chosen the scriptural way to promote unity of doctrine and uniformity in practice. We are simply following in the paths of our forefathers, Song of Solomon 1.8, Jeremiah 6.16, and imitating their godly and biblical example while hoping for the same blessing of God upon our efforts that they enjoyed upon theirs. The Worldwide Vision of the Puritan Reformed Church of Edmonton The PRCE is committed to promoting covenanted national Presbyterian churches which will rule the Church of Christ in covenanted unity and uniformity.

Perhaps some may scoff and think that the PRCE is just dreaming about a high-in-the-sky ideal, but if we stop and consider what the Millennial Church will be like, we will recognize that covenanted unity in doctrine and uniformity in practice are its essential components. The Church of Christ must not give up what we know to be true doctrine simply because what we hope for seems so far away. Thomas McCree comments, Are there any who, when they hear of the future of uniting all Christians in profession, affection and practice, are disposed to receive the intimation with a smile of incredulity, to treat the prospect as visionary, and to exclaim, How can these things be? Will God create a new race on the earth? Will He give new structure to the minds of men? Will they not continue to think and act about religion as they have done from the beginning until now? Hear the word of the Lord, you scornful men! Is it a small matter for you to worry men? Will you worry my God also? Has He not said, I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me? Jeremiah 32.29 And will He not do it? Let God be true and every man a liar.

Romans 3.4 When the time comes, the time which He is set for accomplishing His promise, He shall arise, and every difficulty and every obstruction shall give way before Him and vanish at His approach. Do you ask a sign? Do you ask it in the heaven above? It is He that binds the sweet influences of Pleiades and loosens the frozen bands of Orion, and that guides Arcturus with his sons. Job 38.31 Do you ask it in the earth beneath? The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11.6 The Infinite One has in His faithful word pledged all His perfections for the accomplishment of this work. What resistance can be opposed to infinite power put in motion by infinite love and guided by infinite wisdom? He can raise up instruments properly qualified and disposed for promoting His design, guide their counsels, animate them to constancy and perseverance, and finally crown all their exertions with the wished-for success.

He has the hearts of all men in His hand and can turn them like the waters in an aqueduct. He can rebuke the spirit of error and delusion, cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land and remove and abolish all things that offend in His kingdom. He can subdue the most stubborn and inveterate prejudices, allay the fiercest heats and animosities, convert jealousies into confidence and hatred into love, and having made the wrath of man to praise Him by accomplishing His purposes, He can restrain the remainder thereof.

Who is among you that fears the Lord and obeys the voice of His servant who walks in darkness and has no light as to the removal or abatement of the melancholy divisions of the church? Let him plant his faith firmly on the promises of Jehovah and stay himself on His perfections. Say with the prophet Jeremiah, in a similar case, Ah, Lord God, behold, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth by Thy great power, and there is nothing too hard for Thee. The great, the mighty God, the Lord of hosts, is His name, great in counsel and mighty in work.

Place yourself in spirit in the midst of the emblematical valley into which Ezekiel was carried, and say, God who raises the dead can easily do this. Ezekiel 37, 1-14 and 2 Corinthians 1-9 Rivers deep and broad, seas noisy and tempestuous, on which no galley with oars can go, neither gallant ship ride, Isaiah 33-21, have departed the territories which the God of heaven has given to His Son and prevented the intercourse of His subjects. But He shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, and with His mighty wind shall He shake His hand over the river and shall smite it in the seven streams and make men go over dry shod.

And there shall be an highway for the remnant of His people, like as it was to Israel in the day that He came out of the land of Egypt, Isaiah 11, 15 and 16. Brazen mountains of separation may stand in the way of the desirable event, but the resistance which they oppose to it shall be overcome, not according to the confused plan of modern projectors by throwing a scaffolding over them by which those who have reared altars on their tops may hold occasional intercourse and partial communion, but in a way becoming the New Testament Zerubbabel, the disperser of confusion. When He rends the heavens and comes down to do things which we look not for, the mountains shall flow down at His presence, Isaiah 64, 1. Those separations which have been of most ancient date and which threaten to last forever shall yield to His power.

The everlasting mountains shall be scattered, the perpetual hills shall bow before Him whose ways are everlasting, Habakkuk 3.6. If there shall be one that has reared its head above all the rest and makes a more formidable resistance, it also shall crumble down and disappear. Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain, Zechariah 4.7. Then shall the mountain on which the house of God is built be established on the top of the mountains and exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it. And He will rebuke and repress the envious risings of its proudest rival.

A hill of God is the hill of Bashan, a high hill of Bashan. But why lift ye up yourselves, ye high hills? This, Zion, is the hill which God desireth to dwell in. Yea, the Lord will dwell in it forever, Psalm 68, 15 and 16.

May God fulfill these promises in due time, and unto Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. That's taken from Thomas McCree's Unity of the Church.

We cannot walk together with Mr. Bacon in his schismatic practice and agree to this endless multiplying of rival church courts. We believe that it is sin to associate or comply with such schismatic societies. We call upon all those who see the scriptural principles being violated to separate from such schisms and work together with us toward one national covenanted unity and uniformity.

This is the true doctrine of the Second Reformation, and we praise God that it will again be victorious. And closing with a quote from the Reformed Presbytery's short vindication of our covenanted reformation, These modern pygmies are too far dwarfed in intellectual stature to measure the altitude of our glorious covenanted reformation. A reformation which, embedded in the law and the covenant of God, has already brought civil and ecclesiastical freedom to many millions, and which is doubtless destined to be laid in the foundation of reconstructed society in the millennial period of the world.

Thank you for listening to Chapter 2 of The Covenanted Reformation Defended Against Contemporary Schismatics by Greg Barrow. Please note that this tape is not copyrighted, and we therefore encourage you to copy and distribute it to all who you think might benefit. The full-length book is available from Stillwater's Revival Books, 4710 37A Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T6L 3T5.

The phone number is area code 780-450-3730, and the area code is 403 until January 1st, 1999. Or, the full-length book is available free on Stillwater's webpage, www.swrb.com. Stillwater's publishes a treasure trove of the finest biblical, Protestant, and Reformed literature available anywhere today. They'll send you a free catalog at your request, so contact them today.

Stillwater's Revival Books, publishing the true peace for the scriptural unity and purity of Christ's Church.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/3/SID3043.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/greg-barrow/debate-on-the-meaning-of-the-church-in-reformation-thought/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net