

Christianity: A Crisis of Authority

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Christianity, that most Piscean of institutions, has played a conspicuous and sometimes dominant role in the world for two thousand years. During that long period it provided humanity with experiences of sainthood and depravity, exaltation and degradation of consciousness, freedom and tyranny, truth and falsehood, peace and war. Christianity spread the Gospel to every corner of the globe, brought people to God, fed the hungry, healed the sick, and inspired great works of art, music and architecture. Christian churches fought in God's name against common enemies, and often against one another. They spent lavishly on their own institutions and on monuments to One who espoused simplicity and poverty. They suppressed heresies and social movements, and repressed women, indigent people, and minorities.

It is easy to see the churches' problems.¹ It is more difficult to see how they will overcome those problems and adapt to the 21st century, the Aquarian Age, and the influx of 7th-ray energies. In many people's eyes, organized religion has reached the end of its useful life, soon to pass into the oblivion of history and make way for either unfettered materialism or a new and different kind of spirituality. This essay looks at just one problem: religious authority. But perhaps, in studying this problem, we can see a vital, continuing role for the churches as teaching institutions aligned with the Hierarchy and the World Teacher. Perhaps we can glimpse the outline of a new world religion.

Origins of Church Authority

The first Christians came from Judaic, Hellenic, Neoplatonist, Gnostic, Mithraic, and other backgrounds and brought with them a variety of expectations, aspirations, and traditions. As Elaine Pagels notes:

Those who identified themselves as Christians entertained many—and radically different—religious beliefs and practices. And the communities scattered throughout the known world organized themselves in ways that differed widely from one group to another.²

Some Christians emphasized the spiritual life, others scripture and the historical Jesus, and still others the prevailing theologies of the Messiah, the Sun God, and the Logos.³ Philosophers, priests, mystery school initiates, and ordinary people together in response to Christ's message. Diversity and inclusiveness were early Christianity's great strengths, while all sought to bring light and love into their individual and collective lives.

However, Christianity needed to define itself. Was it a new popular religion, a philosophical system, a priesthood, an initiatory school, or a political movement? To give Christianity a recognizable identity, choices had to be made, some guided by wisdom and some by expediency. The church's first responsibility was to guard and disseminate Christ's teachings, and, given this responsibility, too much diversity and inclusiveness might be undesirable.

Paul, a Roman citizen schooled in the intellectual freedom of Hellenic culture, felt it necessary to criticize diversity among the Corinthians and Galatians:

I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me... that there are contentions among you.⁴

If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed... O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?⁵

“Accursed” was a strong term to use against fellow Christians. But in his letter to Titus, Paul hurled abuse at other groups, even the one into which Jesus had been born:

For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake. One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are alway liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.⁶

Leaders of the new religion were zealous to protect the integrity of the teachings with which they were entrusted. Irenaeus (c. 130-202), Bishop of Lyons and leading polemicist of his time, emphasized the need for Christianity to speak with one voice:

(T)he Church, having received this preaching and this faith... as if occupying but one house, carefully preserves it. She also believes these points [of doctrine] just as if she had but one soul, and one and the same heart, and she proclaims them, and teaches them, and hands them down, with perfect harmony, as if she possessed only one mouth... (A)s the sun, that creature of God, is one and the same throughout the whole world, so also the preaching of the truth shineth everywhere, and enlightens all men that are willing to come to a knowledge of the truth.⁷

The church began to see itself in a privileged position, as the designated interpreter of Christ's message, indeed as the appointed intermediary between the faithful and God. Orthodoxy in faith, morals, and religious practice was demanded of all who called themselves Christians. But what was—or was not—orthodox, and how should that be decided? For that matter, what precisely was “the church,” and who was authorized to speak for it?

Discussions over questions of orthodoxy often degenerated into power struggles. To raise the stakes in debate, adversaries traded charges of heresy and—like Paul—curses, or *anathemas*. Those with enough influence in the church could silence their opponents. Origenes Adamantius (c. 185-254)—better known as Origen—defended mainstream doctrine against the gnosticism of Valentinus. But later, Demetrius, Bishop of Alexandria condemned him as a heretic for suggesting that salvation might extend to Satan. Origen was silenced in the West, but he continued to teach at Caesarea because Demetrius' decree was not recognized in Greece and Palestine.⁸

Combating heresy has always been a major concern of the church. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) explained the battle's practical implications:

(T)he rejection of heretics makes the tenets of Thy Church and sound doctrine to stand out more clearly. For there must also be heresies, that the approved may be made manifest among the weak.⁹

Drawing boundaries helped define Christian identity. And unequivocal statements of truth impressed the masses and strengthened the church's hold over them.

The Authority of Rome

As the church developed as a political institution, its power base shifted from the Middle East to Rome, capital of the empire. The bishop of Rome emerged as an important—and eventually *the* most important—spokesperson and arbiter of disputes. Fragmented attempts to control the

development of Christianity gave way to firm centralized control, and church authority came to mean papal authority

Some local churches managed to exercise a measure of autonomy. The Celtic church preserved significant independence until the 10th or 11th centuries because of geographical isolation. Among its distinctive practices were the ordination of women priests and bishops.¹⁰ Other groups split from Rome because of doctrinal or political disagreements. The eastern churches began to drift away as early as the 5th century, in part because of the disintegration of the Roman Empire. Their formal split with Rome occurred in 1054 when Pope Leo IX and Patriarch Michael Cerularius of Constantinople excommunicated each other with mutual anathemas.

Nevertheless, Rome consolidated its power in the west. Individuals who challenged the church's authority faced imprisonment, torture, and execution, while rebellious groups faced the military power of the church and its political allies. "The Church Militant" took on a direct, literal meaning. Crusades were organized against Islam and also against enemies within Christianity. For 35 years the Albigensian Crusades, led by French barons, sought to suppress the breakaway sect known as the *Cathari*. Women and children were massacred in several campaigns, and the Cathar's last stronghold at Montségur in the Pyrenees fell to the crusaders in 1244.

The balance of power between Rome and Europe's secular rulers constantly shifted. At times the national rulers would do the pope's bidding, while at other times the pope would do theirs. In the 9th and 10th centuries, the German emperors exerted substantial influence over the papacy. Later, from 1309 to 1377, the popes virtually became prisoners of the French at Avignon. During that period King Philip IV of France took advantage of his position to crush the Poor Knights of Christ and the Temple of Solomon—the Knights Templar. His probable motive was jealousy of their wealth and influence, but he accused them of blasphemy, heresy, and immorality. A number of knights signed false confessions under torture, and based on those confessions Pope Clement V was persuaded to suppress the order. Many of its members were executed, and the Knight's last grand master, Jacques de Molay, went to the stake in 1314.¹¹

From 1378 to 1417, after the return from Avignon, the Great Schism erupted when two—and for a short time three—individuals claimed the chair of Peter. However, the spiritual authority of whoever sat in that chair was unquestioned. The Council of Florence (1438-1445) pronounced that

(T)he holy Apostolic see and the Roman pontiff holds the primacy over the whole world; and that the Roman pontiff himself is the successor of the blessed Peter Prince of the Apostles and the true Vicar of Christ, and the head of the whole Church, and the father and teacher of all Christians, and that to him in blessed Peter the full power of feeding, ruling and governing the universal Church was given by our Lord Jesus Christ, and this is also recognized in the acts of the ecumenical council and in the sacred canons.¹²

This pronouncement refers to the Petrine text, the most important buttress to Rome's claim to supremacy:

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.¹³

Christ founded the church and appointed Simon Peter its temporal head. Peter became Bishop of Rome, with the power to consecrate new bishops. Thus, the apostolic succession was established, extending through the lineage of 265th popes to the current office-holder, John Paul II.

Amidst the intrigues of the Great Schism, an event occurred that would have far-reaching implications for papal supremacy. In 1415 Jan Hus, priest and professor at the University of Prague,

was burned at the stake. He had challenged the Eucharistic doctrine of transubstantiation and also preached the Gospel in the Czech language rather than Latin. After his death, Hus was hailed as a martyr. His followers rebelled against papal domination and, during the 1420s, turned back successive assaults by a German army sent to crush them. In mid-century, almost before the ink on the Council of Florence's proclamation was dry, the Hussites organized the Unity of Brethren, later known as the Moravian Church. The Brethren can be considered the first Protestant denomination.

The Protestant Reformation officially started sixty years later, on All Saints' Eve, 1517. On that date, Martin Luther nailed to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany, his 95 Theses "for the purposes of eliciting truth." This defiant action by an Augustinian monk was partly a disagreement over doctrine and partly a reaction against the political ambitions—and scandals—of Pope Alexander VI and the Borgia family. In any event it set in motion a series of reform movements that quickly swept across Europe. Luther (1483-1546), Huldrych Zwingli (1484-1531) in Switzerland, Jean Calvin (1509-1564) in France, and the other reformers were sharply divided on many issues, but they were united in asserting that religious authority lay, not in the institutional church, but in the Bible. National churches emerged that, like the Eastern Orthodox churches, lay outside Rome's control.

Church Authority Since the Reformation

The Reformation may have ended Roman dominance of western Christianity, but it did not usher in religious freedom. Nor, despite the reformer's assertions, did it bring an end to centralized authority. The reformed churches used Catholicism's system of authority as the prototype for their own and soon imposed doctrinal uniformity within their jurisdictions. For example, at the Diet of Augsburg in 1530, Luther's followers submitted their *Confession* for approval by the Emperor Charles V. Its preamble to the 28 "Articles of Faith & Doctrine," expressed the hope that participants in the Diet

may come together, as far as this may be honorably done, and... the dissension, by God's help, may be done away and brought back to one true accordant religion; for as we all are under one Christ and do battle under Him, we ought to confess the one Christ, after the tenor of Your Imperial Majesty' edict...¹⁴

The *Confession* acknowledged possible variations in religious practice: "(It is (not) necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike." And it warned against abuses of ecclesiastical power:

There has been great controversy concerning the Power of Bishops, in which some have awkwardly confounded the power of the Church and the power of the sword. And from this confusion great wars and tumults have resulted."¹⁵

However, no differences could be tolerated in matters of faith. Scripture might be the sole source of divine revelation, but each Protestant church claimed the right to interpret it and to distinguish truth from heresy. The Lutheran *Confession* named the Manichaeans, Valentinians, Arians, Eunomians, Samosatenes, Pelagians, Anabaptists, Donatists, "Mohammedans and all such" as heretics. Everything had changed, but nothing had changed.

The Reformed Church in Switzerland produced the two *Helvetic Confessions*. The *2nd Confession* of 1562, consisting of 30 articles of doctrine, became the official creed of the Swiss cantons and was also recognized in Scotland, Hungary, France, and Poland. It won a favorable reception in Holland and England and was subsequently acknowledged as one of the most authoritative statements of Puritan theology. The *2nd Confession* affirmed scripture as the sole norm of belief, and condemned the use of images in worship, law, gospel, and faith. It discussed the doctrines of Providence, predestination, the church, ministry, and the sacraments, and it condemned both ancient and contemporary heresies.

Henry VIII of England broke with Rome in 1534 when Pope Clement VII refused to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. But this action was political rather than doctrinal, and Henry intended that the English church would remain essentially Catholic. Protestantism did not take root in England until after his death. In 1563, during the reign of Elizabeth I, the Convocation of Canterbury adopted the *Thirty-Nine Articles*, the central doctrines of the Church of England. As the state religion, the Church of England could use the courts to suppress dissent. Among others, John Biddle (1615-62), father of English Unitarianism, was repeatedly imprisoned for his anti-Trinitarian views.

A cause that united western Christendom after the Reformation was the suppression of witchcraft. Again, the judicial system was used as the enforcement mechanism. Both Catholics and Protestants zealously prosecuted alleged witches and others thought to be allied with Satan. The papal bull *Summis Desiderantes*, issued by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484, established procedures for witch trials and authorized torture to secure confessions. Despite its Roman origin, it was adopted by the major Protestant denominations, and 28 editions were printed over the next 120 years.¹⁶ From 1500 onward Europe was caught up in a witch-hunt mania which lasted through the end of the 18th century. Thousands of people—mostly women—were sentenced to death, often on the flimsiest of evidence. The mania spread to North America, and in 1692 nineteen women were executed in Salem, Massachusetts. Judicial executions for witchcraft ended in Europe after two Polish women were burned at the stake in 1792.

The Church of Rome has never wavered in its claim to supreme authority. In 1870, the 1st Vatican Council formally promulgated the doctrine of infallibility, based on the Petrine text's "binding" and "loosing." As a thunderstorm broke over the city, the assembled bishops determined that "The Roman Pontiff cannot err in defining matters of faith and morals." That power had been anticipated in 1854, when Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. It was used most recently in 1950 when Pius XII declared that the Assumption of Mary was an article of faith. The 2nd Vatican Council (1962-65) confirmed that "the Immaculate Virgin, preserved free from all stain of original sin, was taken up body and soul into heavenly glory, when her earthly life was over, and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things."¹⁷ Neither of the two Marian doctrines has scriptural support.

Consistent with its claim to supremacy, the Catholic Church long rejected any notion of ecumenism. The church was intended by Christ to be an "absolutely universal and imposed upon all men a solemn obligation actually to belong to it, unless inculpable ignorance should excuse them."¹⁸ Nevertheless, Vatican II initiated a program of ecumenical outreach, and, very recently, there have even been signs that the Roman Church might soften its position on doctrinal authority. In an encyclical letter to bishops and scholars, Pope John Paul II acknowledged that the search for truth includes a personal dimension:

In both East and West, we may trace a journey which has led humanity down the centuries to meet and engage truth more and more deeply. It is a journey which has unfolded—as it must—within the horizon of personal self-consciousness: the more human beings know reality and the world, the more they know themselves in their uniqueness...¹⁹

The Protestant churches have never claimed infallibility, but they continue to issue pronouncements on matters of faith and morals and, for the most part, expect compliance by members. The churches may impose sanctions on dissenting seminaries and congregations, and ministers and even lay persons may be censured or excommunicated. In some denominations, guidance on faith and morals is centralized, but disciplinary action is taken locally. For example, in Lutheran churches, excommunication is the responsibility of local congregations "acting in Christ's name." In the words of one authoritative statement:

He (Christ) desires that a sinner in a congregation be regarded as a heathen and a tax collector and that the dreadful judgement of excommunication be pronounced on him only after manifold private admonitions and the public admonition before and by the congregation have proved themselves fruitless.²⁰

The British monarch technically is Head of the Church of England and “Defender of the Faith,” but in recent times few monarchs have expressed doctrinal opinions. Even the archbishop of Canterbury has limited doctrinal power. Initially the 39 Articles were imposed on Anglican clergy, but since 1865 clergy have had to declare only that the Articles are “agreeable to the Word of God.” The Lambeth Conference, a periodic gathering of Anglican bishops, seeks consensus, but it exercises no central authority. For the most part, the Church of England tries to be inclusive rather than exclusive in determining individual membership. The onus is more on the state church to determine who is *not* a member than on the individual to demonstrate eligibility.

Leaders of the Episcopal Church in the United States issue occasional directives on religious discipline. For example, in the 1960s, Bishop James A. Pike of California condemned the practice of glossolalia (speaking in tongues) on the grounds that it verged on heresy.²¹ However, Pike himself became the target of colleagues’ criticism for publicly discussing the psychic phenomena experienced after his son’s death.²²

Baptists traditionally have asserted “the soul’s competency before God, freedom in religion, and the priesthood of the believer.”²³ And theoretically each congregation is autonomous. Recently, however, leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States have steadily increased pressure on members to embrace a conservative stance on moral and social issues. In 1997 the SBC launched a boycott of the Walt Disney Company to protest corporate policies that allegedly favored homosexuals and threatened the family. And in 1998 it affirmed a controversial ideal of the “biblical family.” In an amendment to the “Baptist faith and message,” the SBC stated that:

A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God, as is her husband, and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.”²⁴

The Challenge to Church Authority

Galileo Galilei was condemned for heresy in 1616 and again in 1633 for gathering astronomical evidence supporting the Copernican theory of the solar system. After being shown the instruments of torture, Galileo recanted and spent the last eight years of his life under house arrest. He remembered the fate of fellow mathematician Giordano Bruno. Bruno, who had challenged, among other things, belief in a geocentric universe, went to the stake in 1600. Why were these ideas so threatening? One reason was that the supposedly unique act of redemption required the Earth to occupy a privileged position in the universe. But this privileged position was also a metaphor for Rome’s position in the Christian world. To protect its own central authority the church had to defend a geocentric universe.

During his heresy trial, Galileo invited the cardinals of the Roman Curia to look through his telescope to see the moons of Jupiter, but they refused. This incident was symptomatic of an ongoing problem in the Church of Rome—and also in the Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches. Closed-mindedness, combined with the ruthless suppression of dissent, have colored religious authority throughout most of Christendom.

Over the last one hundred years, however, the churches’ ability to impose their will has steadily declined. The erosion of political power, growth of scientific institutions, increasing levels of

general education, access to information resources, and in some cases declining respect for church leaders have all contributed to a new sense of independence that the medieval church—or even the churches of the post-Reformation era—never faced. The dungeon, the rack, and the stake are no longer available as instruments of coercion. Excommunication may simply swell the ranks and coffers of competing denominations, and threats of damnation may be received with skepticism or scorn. Doctrinal pronouncements are no longer accepted uncritically, moral dicta tend to be ignored, and censorship fails in an era of mass media and the Internet.

Even the clergy openly disagree with official positions. The United Methodist Church traditionally has taken a relatively liberal stance on social teachings. But in August 1998 its Judicial Council raised to the level of canon law a rule prohibiting the celebration of same-sex unions. Pastors who disobeyed the law could be defrocked. However, dissent continued. Early in 1999, in a public act of ecclesiastical disobedience, 84 Methodist pastors participated in a lesbian “wedding.” A statement issued before the ceremony declared: “We believe we are acting in the way in which Jesus Christ would act.” Hard-liners were expected to file charges against the ringleader, even though his own bishop personally disagreed with the canon law.²⁵

Denominations that watered down traditional doctrines and tolerate a range of beliefs and practices have not always enjoyed greater support. Tolerance and inclusiveness may be perceived as weaknesses or, alternatively, may imply personal responsibilities that people are reluctant to bear. Furthermore, change is threatening. Many people yearn for the simplicity and certainty of “old-time religion” and look to their churches for straight answers, firm guidance, and a sense of security,

With this encouragement, the more conservative denominations continue to find ways to impose their will, particularly on moral issues. For example, they may force the government to prohibit divorce or contraception. In the United States the Religious Right has made great efforts to get the political and legal systems to do its bidding. It has achieved substantial influence over the Republican Party and has become a powerful lobby at all levels of American politics. Fundamentalist views often dominate debate over such issues as the separation of church and state, school prayer, abortion, and gay rights.

Meanwhile, there are calls for radical changes to the whole structure of Christianity. The Tibetan makes several references in his books to a new world religion that will synthesize the “differentiated spiritual aspirations, as expressed today in many world religions...” The work of developing the new religion will not be entrusted exclusively to the present church institutions. The Tibetan specifically suggests that the new religion will involve elements of Masonic tradition. However, the churches will be able to participate to the extent that they share the vision of developing “a channel for the activity of the second Ray of Love-Wisdom...”²⁶ The development will also require the participation of the Hierarchy:

This new religion will take the form of a conscious unified group approach to the world of spiritual values, evoking in its turn reciprocal action from Those Who are the citizens of that world—the planetary Hierarchy and affiliated groups.²⁷

In the Tibetan’s vision, members of the Hierarchy will replace churchmen as the intermediaries between the faithful and divine power. The need for these intermediaries becomes clear when the magical nature of future rituals is understood:

The new religion will be one of Invocation and Evocation, of bringing together great spiritual energies and then stepping them down for the benefiting and the stimulation of the masses. The work of the new religion will be the distribution of spiritual energy and the protecting of humanity from energies and forces which they are not, at the particular time, fitted to receive.²⁸

Conclusion

Christianity was the crowning glory of the Piscean Age, teaching Christ's message, organizing the masses into religious practice, and nurturing spiritual development. But it was a human institution, and its leaders quickly succumbed to the temptations of power. In a strange irony, Christianity modeled itself on what, originally, were its two bitterest enemies: the Pharisees and the Roman Empire. It sought to control what people did, what they said, and even what they thought. From its privileged position, the church pontificated on issues ranging from the nature of God to the intervals in the musical scale.²⁹ It claimed a frightening level of authority and, over long periods, was able to enforce it with an effectiveness that the world's secular dictators and tyrants could only envy. The claim to total authority has waned in recent years, but it is not yet dead.

True to its Piscean tradition, Christianity has been idealistic but separative. To build an identity it had to distinguish itself from what was *not*. Truth was distinguished from heresy, the faithful from infidels, members from nonmembers, Catholics from Protestants, saints from sinners, sheep from goats. The churches assigned favored souls to heaven and others to hell.

The churches sought to protect the Word of God. But in insisting on One Eternal Truth, backed up in the most extreme case by a system of "infallible"—and therefore irreversible—pronouncements, they shut the door on new perspectives, new revelation, and unfolding human consciousness. They stifled spiritual insights and scientific discovery. The churches have always stressed doctrine over individual experience and insight. As Matthew Fox comments, doctrine has its proper place:

Doctrine, which is left-brained, has a limited but useful role to play. Much as a painter needs a frame within which to paint the best picture she can, so doctrine allows persons to concentrate on in-depth play.³⁰

However, he warns: "When doctrine becomes a starting point for faith, I fear faith is already dead." Five years after Fox, a Dominican priest, wrote those words, he was silenced by the Vatican.

Christianity is at a point of crisis. Churches that resist change may attract reactionary people, and their ability to intimidate others should not be underestimated. But progress is inevitable, and their eventual destruction is certain. On the other hand, churches should not expect to survive simply because they are liberal, inclusive, tolerant, and undemanding. Like all institutions that compete in the marketplace, the churches must also add *value*. Most people resent being coerced, but they do want to be led, inspired—and taught. People today are hungry for ideas, honest answers, and truth.

The churches must drop their traditional defensiveness in the face of challenge and change. They must recognize that any truth formulated by the human mind is incomplete and temporary, to be replaced by or incorporated into a larger truth. Different viewpoints should be encouraged, inconsistencies tolerated, and morality allowed to evolve. The churches can no longer claim to have in their midst the best intellects, the most knowledge, or the clearest insights. They must be willing to embrace truth from whatever source it may come. As the Tibetan insists:

(The churches) must learn to recognize that the Lord is not with them and they too must go forth, as Mary did, and seek him anew. If they will do so, they will surely find Him and again become His messengers... (T)he Living Christ will walk among men and lead them onward towards the Mount of Ascension... All men will come under the tide of inspiration from on high, and though they may speak with many tongues, they will all understand each other.³¹

Science obviously is a major source of unfolding truth, and the churches should welcome scientific discovery, even if it threatens existing doctrine. The combination of scientific and metaphysical inquiry can lead to important new insights, as large numbers of scientists already recognize.

The churches should continue the service activities for which they are justly renowned, but they also have a bright future as teaching institutions. The churches should establish new centers of spiritual learning, like the Renaissance universities, whose mission extends beyond ministerial training. In today's sophisticated intellectual environment these church institutions must *present*, not *dictate*. They must provide learning experiences and stimulate research, not push dogma. The new institutions will be judged by the stature of their teachers, the quality of their teachings, and the climate of exciting discovery they create.

Finally, the churches should build upon their traditional expertise in ritual. The Wesak festival, the Festival of the Christ in the sign of Gemini, and the other Full-Moon festivals should be incorporated into the liturgical calendar. The sacraments, ritual forms designed to invoke divine energy, will become more important as 7th ray influence increases. The Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Churches can play a special role in this area because they have preserved all seven sacraments. But they must ease restrictions on access to the sacraments, they must acknowledge the magical nature of sacramental rituals, and they should be willing to enter into joint studies with occult groups who can share complementary experiences. The churches must modernize language—particularly in Eucharistic rituals—derived, not just from the Piscean Age, but from the Age of Aries that preceded it. The need for expertise, a sense of sharing, and joyous participation in the celebration of ritual has never been greater.

Christianity may never have been intended to become a mystery school. But now that the mysteries are being opened to the masses, the churches can take a leadership role, collaborating with the Hierarchy to make this possible. The churches should pursue the science of invocation and evocation through which “man will begin to use his divine power and come into closer touch with the spiritual source of all life.”³² The Great Invocation should become an essential element in religious services. The churches should develop a new priesthood for the Aquarian Age, not set apart from the people but embracing and serving them. The priesthood should include roles for both priests and priestesses, as it did in the esoteric schools of antiquity and in the ancient Celtic church.

All forms eventually become crystallized and constricting. They must either develop new flexibility or be destroyed to allow the indwelling life to expand and grow. Church authority can and should be redirected to acknowledge, in deeds as well as words, the higher authority of the masters and the Christ. It must be an authority rooted in service to humanity and aligned with the unfolding Plan. The churches can draw upon their strengths to spearhead the formation of a new world religion. If they fail to rise to the challenge, they will be swept away and new institutions will take their place.

¹ Alice A. Bailey. *Problems of Humanity*. Lucis Trust, 1947, pp. 122-166.

² Elaine Pagels. *The Gnostic Gospels*. Random House, 1979, p. xxiii.

³ David Fideler. *Jesus Christ, Sun of God*. Quest Books, 1993.

⁴ *I Corinthians* 1:10-11 (KJV)

⁵ *Galatians* 1:9, 3:1 (KJV)

⁶ *Titus* 1:10-14 (KJV)

⁷ Irenaeus. *Adversus haereses*. Book I, chapter 10, 180-199.

⁸ *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

⁹ Augustine. *Confessions*. Book 7, article 25.

¹⁰ Peter B. Ellis. *Celtic Women*. Eerdmans, 1995, p. 142.

¹¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

¹² *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Encyclopedia Press, 1913-1990.

¹³ *Matthew* 16:18-19 (KJV)

¹⁴ *The Augsburg Confession*, 1530. Preface. (Translated by F. Bente & W. H. T. Dau.)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Article 28.

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- ¹⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica*.
- ¹⁷ *Catholic Encyclopedia*.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*.
- ¹⁹ John Paul II. Encyclical Letter: *Fides et Ratio*, October 1998.
- ²⁰ Douglas D. Fusselman. "Who Holds the Keys? Luther on the Power of Jurisdiction." *Lutheran Theological Review*, Spring/Summer 1994.
- ²¹ Frank Stagg, E. Glenn Hinson & Wayne E. Oates. *Glossolalia*. Abingdon Press, 1967.
- ²² James A. Pike. *The Other Side*. Allen, 1968.
- ²³ Southern Baptist Convention, May 9, 1963.
- ²⁴ Policy statement: "The Family." June 9, 1998.
- ²⁵ Associated Press, January 15, 1999.
- ²⁶ Alice A. Bailey. *Discipleship in the New Age*, I. Lucis, part 4, p. 38.
- ²⁷ Alice A. Bailey. *Education in the New Age*. Lucis, pp. 123.
- ²⁸ Alice A. Bailey. *Externalisation of the Hierarchy*. Lucis, p. 401.
- ²⁹ Ernest G. McClain. *The Myth of Invariance*. Nicholas-Hays, 1976, p. 112.
- ³⁰ Matthew Fox. *Original Blessing*. Bear & Co., 1983
- ³¹ *Externalization of the Hierarchy*, p. 471
- ³² *Externalisation of the Hierarchy*, p. 401.