

Note to the Reader

I wanted to write a book on ‘The Fall of the Church’; or, more precisely, its consequences. By ‘The Fall of the Church’ I mean the way in which the original purity of the *ekklēsia* was ruined in the fourth century by Constantine in league with the Fathers, when between them they invented Christendom. That’s what I wanted to write about. But, as I say, not simply to set out the historical fact. I wanted to write about the way this ‘Fall’ effects us today.¹

But as I started to write, I soon became convinced that, despite the measure of truth which there is within the phrase, ‘The Fall of the Church’, this ‘Fall’ is, in fact, a myth. And it is a myth which had been staring me in the face all the time: the *ekklēsia* did not retain its purity until the fourth century, and then, as it were, in one calamitous step, plunge over the cliff, falling into ruin. Virtually from the word ‘go’, right from the time of the apostles, the *ekklēsia* was marred by man; and it has never recovered. That has become my conviction. This marring by man I see written large in Scripture; and played out in the subsequent history of the Church.

This does not mean that I no longer think that the Fathers and Constantine did immense harm to the *ekklēsia* and the gospel by setting up Christendom – ‘The Fall of the Church’ if you will – but I now see Christendom as but one of many downward steps – the worst of the lot, indeed – into the present ruinous state of the *ekklēsia*. Later centuries – including the twentieth and our own – have continued the plunging spiral.

¹ Without any design on my part, I can see that this present book is a kind of climax to several of my earlier works, works such as *Battle; Infant; The Pastor; The Priesthood; The Upper Room*, and various articles on topics relevant to what follows. And on a broader front, my works on the law, the new covenant and its implications come into this category.

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From time to time, steps have been taken to try to rectify the position, but the decline continues.

Many disagree with me. They believe that the history of the church is a triumphant epic, even down to our own day.

Others – an increasing number, it seems to me – who, thinking that the present state of the church leaves a great deal to be desired, nevertheless claim that Scripture warrants us to expect a restitution or restoration of something like a ‘Golden’ time for the *ekklēsia*. Indeed, they have called upon a prophetic system – postmillennialism – to argue – with what at times seems like unbounded confidence – for a triumphant, glorious time for the *ekklēsia* before Christ returns. And, as far as I understand it, this coming ‘Golden Age’, in their opinion, will knock the apostolic time into a cocked hat! They anticipate an overwhelming revival, with a great number of Jews being converted, leading to a massive awakening among the Gentiles. Under this scheme, the three thousand of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), soon swelling by another two thousand (Acts 4:4), will be seen as a mere pinprick! The coming ‘revival’ will be world-wide!

While I am convinced that believers should always be striving to reform themselves (individually) and the *ekklēsia* (corporately), with the aim of recovering Christ’s new-covenant pattern revealed in the post-Pentecost Scriptures (however far beyond reach that excellent aim might be in this fallen world), I vehemently discount any expectation of a triumphant spiritual kingdom *before* Christ returns.

Does this mean there is no hope? Far from it! Triumph – the triumphant fulfilment of God’s eternal purpose – is certain.

All this I see in Scripture.

And that’s the background to my book.

One other point. This book – the one that you are now are in danger of reading – was not written by an academic having a scholarly debate with other academics. No! It was written by an everyday sort of believer who was trying to set out what he sees

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in Scripture, doing so in a way that might help other everyday believers come to terms with a difficult, but unavoidable, topic.