

WHY So Many Denominations?

Is Christ divided? There are hundreds of denominations in America — and many other little groups and sects. WHY? When did this confusion originate?

by Herman L. Hoeh

IT'S HARD to believe, but it's TRUE! The actual *facts* of history — both Biblical and secular — are astonishing!

It's time we looked behind this curtain! It's time you *knew* how, when, and where all this religious confusion started.

Every thinking person — every denomination — realizes that, at some time in history, there has been a great apostasy or falling away from original TRUTH.

Only One Church

Jesus Christ did not found *many denominations!* Christ said, "I will build my Church" (Matt. 16:18). *He did build it!* ONE Church, commissioned to preach and to publish His Gospel — the very Message He brought from God — to all the world!

But what do we find today? Hundreds of different and disagreeing churches, all founded by MEN, each *professing* to teach the truth, yet contradicting and disagreeing with all the others.

The Church in Prophecy

While most people today suppose that the true CHURCH was rapidly to grow BIG, to become a powerful organization, exerting powerful influence on the world, making this a better world, becoming the stabilizing influence of the world's civilization, actually *Christ founded His Church for no such purpose!*

In His final prayer for His ONE Church, Jesus prayed: "I pray for *them*: I pray *not* for the world... Holy

Father, keep *through thine own name* those whom thou hast given me, *that they may be ONE*, as we are... I have given them thy word; and *the world hateth them*, because *they are not OF the world*, even as I am not OF the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil. *They are not OF the world*, even as I am not OF the world" (John 17:9-16).

Those of His Church are described as being strangers and foreigners in this world — AMBASSADORS for Christ — ambassadors representing HIS Kingdom which is *foreign* to this world — yet never being OF the world!

To Be Scattered

This true Church of God was to be PERSECUTED — SCATTERED! "If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you," said Jesus to His disciples (John 15:20). "ALL that will live godly in Christ Jesus *shall suffer persecution*" (II Tim. 3:12).

On the night Jesus was seized to be crucified, He said: "It is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered" (Mark 14:27). After HE, the Shepherd, was crucified, the "sheep," — His CHURCH — were to *become scattered!* Previously, that same evening, Jesus had said to His disciples: "Ye shall be *scattered*" (John 16:32).

This persecution and scattering began early. Notice Acts 8:1: "And at that time there was a *great persecution against the Church* which was at Jerusalem; and *they were all scattered*

abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles."

Nowhere is there any prophecy that the One True Church should become great and powerful, exerting influence in this world. Rather, Jesus called it the "Little Flock" (Luke 12:32). Despised, persecuted, scattered BY the world — separate FROM the world! Scattered, but NEVER DIVIDED. Always ONE Church, speaking the SAME thing — *never* many differing sects.

You haven't read much of the history of THAT Church. Even the historians never knew where to look for the TRUE Church — for they didn't even know WHAT the True Church *is*.

Broad Majority Deceived

On the other hand, in the WORLD, all the prophecies foretold apostasy, deception, and division.

Jesus foretold the very *first* event to come on the world — GREAT DECEPTION — climaxing, in *our* day now just ahead, in GREAT TRIBULATION!

"Take heed," He said, "that no man deceive you. For MANY shall come *in my name. saying*, I am Christ; and shall *deceive* MANY!" (Matt. 24:4, 5.)

Notice carefully! It was not the *few* who were to be DECEIVED — but the MANY. It was the FEW who were to become true Christians!

Jesus had pictured this same condition, when He said: "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and MANY there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto

LIFE, and FEW there be that find it" (Matt. 7:13-14).

That isn't what the world believes, is it? Probably that isn't what *you* have always heard, and come to assume. But it's what CHRIST SAID! How deceived this world has become!

Satan is pictured in the Bible as the god of this world. He appears, *not* as a devil, but as a GOD — as an angel of LIGHT. And in Rev. 12:9, you read of "Satan, which *deceiveth* the WHOLE WORLD."

Yes, the MANY would come *in Jesus' name*, proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ — yes, preaching CHRIST to the world! — and yet, without realizing it, DECEIVING the world!

A Lesson to Be Learned

The apostles, instructed directly by Jesus Christ, constantly warned the Church about the great departure from the FAITH that would *begin to occur at the close of their ministry*.

Scarcely twenty years after the crucifixion of Jesus, the Apostle Paul, in one of his first inspired letters, cautioned Christians not to be deceived by false preaching, or by false letters purporting to be from the apostles. "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day [the time of God's intervention in human affairs when Jesus Christ will return to rule the nations] shall not come, except there come a *falling away FIRST*" (II Thess. 2:3).

Apostles Knew What Would Happen

In Acts 20:29-30, the teacher of the Gentiles explains *how* the apostasy would begin. He gathered the elders (ministers) of the church at Ephesus to deliver them a final message concerning their responsibility over the local congregations. "For," said Paul, "*I know this*, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also *of your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things," why? — "*to draw away disciples after them.*" To gain a personal following for themselves! To start a new denomination!

Do you catch the full significance of these two verses? The elders or ministers were especially assembled because,

immediately after Paul would leave Ephesus, there would come within the local church congregations false ministers, wolves in sheep's clothing, to make a prey of Christians; and even from those elders *already in the church congregations* some would pervert the doctrine of Jesus to secure a following for themselves.

Gentile Deception Prophesied

Not only Paul, but also Peter warned the churches that MANY would be misled. There were false teachers among Christians who would bring in heresies, "And MANY shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the *way of truth* shall be evil spoken of" (II Peter 2:2).

When Paul wrote his second letter to the Gentile-born Thessalonians, he instructed them against the "mystery of iniquity" which "*doth already work*" (II Thess. 2:7).

Notice, the cleverly disguised teachings of iniquity or LAWLESSNESS were at work *in Paul's day*. *The Roman world was being filled with numerous mystery religions which stemmed from the old sun-worshipping mysteries.*

False teachers secretly professed to giving a hidden, yet easy way to evade the consequences of breaking God's Law. Jude had to include in his letter the admonition that every Christian "should earnestly contend for the faith which was *once* delivered unto the saints. FOR THERE ARE CERTAIN MEN CREPT IN UNAWARES, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, TURNING THE GRACE OF GOD INTO LASCIVIOUSNESS, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit" (Jude 3, 4, 19).

Jude says *these preachers separated their followers from the body of believers*. By the time John wrote his epistle, he had this sad note to include about those preachers who at first crept in unawares: "*They went out from us, but they were not of us*: for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us" (I John 2:19).

True Christians Forced Out

Although numerous deceivers, called Gnostics, left the church, drawing away disciples after them, there was an even more dangerous apostasy which infiltrated the true Church.

In instructing the evangelist Timothy, the apostle to the Gentiles instructed him to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *after their own lusts*" — the congregations wanting to do what they please — "shall they heap to themselves teachers" — elect ministers who will preach what they want to hear — ". . . and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto *fables*" (II Timothy 4:2-4).

This was in the days of the apostles and evangelists. MANY who fellowshipped in the local congregations of the early church, after about two generations, did not endure sound doctrine because they had not repented and received the Holy Spirit. They elected teachers who, for the sake of money, pleased their wishes by preaching fables — the enticing fables of mysticism and sun-worship that were engulfing the Roman Empire. The letters of Paul were twisted by them to give another meaning than intended (II Peter 3:15-16).

But instead of leaving the local congregations and forming their own sects, as some Gentiles did at first, the false preachers remained within the congregations and *soon began to expel the true Christians*.

In the letter of the Apostle John to Gaius, we read: "I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, AND CASTETH THEM OUT OF THE CHURCH" (III John 9 and 10).

The true Christians, who alone, comprised the true Church, *were being put*

out of the visible, organized congregations. They were the SCATTERED ones of whom John said: "Therefore the world knoweth us not" (I John 3:1). In the Western Roman Empire, where Paul died, the state of Christianity was even more advanced along the paths of error. The name *Christian* was being borne away by leaders who crept into the fellowship of the Church of God and who, in the name of Christ, *deceived the MANY into following their false teachings.*

The Age of Shadows

Following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and the deaths of the apostles, a strange phenomenon is wit-

nessed. The true church almost disappears from history, and false churches arise! Of this period, the famous historian *Gibbon* says: "The scanty and suspicious ecclesiastical history seldom enables us to dispel the dark cloud that hangs over the first age of the church" (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ch. XV).

The truth was obscured by error!

Historian Jesse Lyman Hurlbut gives us even more details in his book *The Story of the Christian Church*, page 41: "We would like to read of the later work of such helpers of St. Paul as Timothy, Apollos and Titus, but all these . . . drop out of the record at his death. For fifty

years after St. Paul's life a curtain hangs over the church through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it rises, about 120 A.D., with the writings of the earliest church-fathers, WE FIND A CHURCH IN MANY ASPECTS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THAT IN THE DAYS OF Peter and Paul."

During that lost century, the true church was lost sight of by most historians. It *has continued* to exist from the time of Christ until the present. But few know where to look for it. If you are interested in this intriguing history of the true church, write in for our free booklet *A True History of the True Church* and the free article, "Should You Join a Church?" □