
SOLA ECCLESIA: RECOVERING MOTHER CHURCH

Rev. Nick Smith
Reformation Sunday 2011
Psalm 87; 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

1. Introduction: Mother Church

2. The Doctrine: Salvation *Sola Ecclesia*

“The visible Church... is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation” (*Westminster Confession*, Chapter 25).

“We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and outside of it there is no salvation, that no person of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself...” (*Belgic Confession*, Article 28).

“Q. What do you believe concerning ‘the holy catholic church’? A. I believe that the Son of God through his Spirit and Word, out of the entire human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, protects, and preserves for himself a community chosen for eternal life and united in true faith. And of this community I am and always will be a living member” (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Q&A 54).

“And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9-10).

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia, 1960), Book IV, Chapter 1, pp. 1016, 1021-1024. “The Visible Church as Mother of Believers. But because it is now our intention to discuss the visible church, let us learn even from the simple title “mother” how useful, indeed how necessary, it is that we should know her. For there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels [Matthew 22:30]. Our weakness does not allow us to be dismissed from her school until we have been pupils all our lives. Furthermore, away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation, as Isaiah [Isaiah 37:32] and Joel [Joel 2:32] testify. Ezekiel agrees with them when he declares that those whom God rejects from heavenly life will not be enrolled among God's people [Ezekiel 13:9]. On the other hand, those who turn to the cultivation of true godliness are said to inscribe their names among the citizens of Jerusalem [cf. Isaiah 56:5; Psalm 87:6]. For this reason, it is said in another psalm: “Remember me, O Jehovah, with favor toward thy people; visit me with salvation: that I may see the well-doing of thy chosen ones, that I may rejoice in the joy of thy nation, that I may be glad with thine inheritance” [Psalm 106:4-5 p.; cf. Psalm 105:4, Vg., etc.]. By these words God's fatherly favor and the special witness of spiritual life are limited to his flock, so that it is always disastrous to leave the church.”

“But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.” (Galatians 4:26)

3. Recovering Church Office

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Hebrews 13:17).

4. Recovering the Church’s Worship

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near...” (Hebrews 10:19, 22).

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering” (Hebrews 12:22).

5. Recovering Church Community

“Q. What do you understand by ‘the communion of saints’? A. First, that believers one and all, as members of this community, share in Christ and in all his treasures and gifts. Second, that each member should consider it a duty to use his gifts readily and cheerfully for the service and enrichment of the other members” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 55).

“But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it...” (1 Corinthians 12:24-27).