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## *Humpty-Dumpty and Some Lessons for the Church*



*Charles H. McGowen, M.D.*

*Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall.*

*Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall.*

*All the king's horses and all the king's men*

*Couldn't put Humpty-Dumpty together again.*

**E**very child and former child that ever read nursery rhymes knows that the mythological anthropomorphic creature called Humpty-Dumpty was an egg. That unfortunate animated hen's ovum encountered a catastrophic and "life-shattering" experience when he tried unsuccessfully to perch himself on a wall. Anyone that has ever tried to sit an egg on end knows that borders on the impossible.

In this monograph Humpty-Dumpty is analogous to the Church. That may seem at first glance to be rather impious, but one must also recall that Jesus used many metaphors in describing his Church. Included in that number are a vineyard, sheep, a bride and his own body. In each instance the Lord's analogy referred to something that was alive. It thus seems fit and proper to use an egg as a metaphor for this living organism called "the Church," since all living things, at their inception began, in one form or another, as eggs.

### THE WALL

The rhyme informs us that Humpty-Dumpty was sitting, or at least attempted to sit, on a wall. Walls serve many purposes, one of which is to divide, or separate things. Thomas Jefferson, in responding to the concerns of a group of Baptist preachers regarding the establishment of a state religion in America, used this figure of speech in his famous, yet misunderstood, statement about "a wall of separation between the State and the Church."

From the moment of its first-century birth, the Church was precariously perched on a wall of separation which our Lord Jesus Christ was determined to destroy. That "wall" represented the distinction between Jewish and Gentile believers. In his letter to the Ephesian Church Paul said,

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit (Ephesians 2:14-18).

In spite of the Lord's desire for unity however, the early Church continually constructed walls, which needed to be torn down. The first is recorded in Acts 6:1-7 where one reads of a cultural controversy that broke out between Greek-speaking Jews (Hellenistic) and Hebraic Jews. The complaint involved the alleged unequal distribution of food to widows. The Apostles resolved this problem by establishing the first deacon board.

When Paul's missionary journeys resulted in the conversion and addition of thousands of Gentiles to the Church, Judaizers demanded strict adherence to Jewish laws. The first Jerusalem Council settled those issues and another wall came down.

In the eleventh century the Church was divided into East and West, Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic, with headquarters located respectively in Constantinople and Rome. That wall of separation exists to this day and divides true saints, the elect of God in each camp.

In the sixteenth century a new wall was erected through the Reformation. While there is little doubt of the need to "reform" the Church as spelled out in the ninety-five theses which Martin Luther nailed to the door of the Wittenburg church, that great historical movement also served to isolate, and separate the invisible Church, with Protestants on one side and Roman Catholic believers on the other. G. K. Chesterton (himself a Roman Catholic) said of the Reformation that it had "shattered Christianity." In some respects he was right.

The Roman Church's problems were for the most part due to corruption and abuse of power at the top. The rank and file members were not responsible for the indulgences and slaughter of innocents (as revealed in *Fox's Book of Martyrs*) that had been perpetrated from Rome. Those believers now sequestered in the Roman camp were as much a part of Christ's body as were Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, and Thomas Aquinas of pre-Reformation times and Roman Catholic sages G. K. Chesterton and Mother Teresa of the twentieth century. One must remember that prior to the Reformation every true Christian was either a member of the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Church. The Reformation, as necessary and providential as it was, constructed a wall that cut those saints off from fellowshiping with Protestant believers. That restriction and impediment to *koinonia* remained until Vatican II when the Roman church lifted many of the restraints that had disallowed and disavowed fellowshiping and worshiping with Protestants.

Even on the Protestant side of that sixteenth-century wall, new walls were insidiously constructed which served to divide Protestants from one another. Those walls, were probably more analogous to fences, supplied with gates for easy passage back and forth, but they still served as divisions. Luther-

ans were soon separated from the Reformed. Then came the Anabaptists (sixteenth century), Baptists, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists. Baptists were further divided into "Regular" (or Reformed) and "General" (or Arminian). Methodists later divided into the "free," the "primitive" and the "united" and the Presbyterians split up into "united," "reformed," "bible" and "orthodox." Today we also have the Evangelical Presbyterians, the PCA and PCUSA.

In the early twentieth century the Pentecostal Churches were established and new walls constructed. Those charismatic denominations consist of the Assemblies of God, the Church of God and the Christian Assemblies. There is also the Quaker Church and its evangelical sister, the Evangelical Friends Church. Lutherans are currently divided into Lutheran, Evangelical Lutheran, and Missouri Synod Lutheran. There used to be a Congregational Church denomination and one called Evangelical and Reformed. Those two merged to become the United Church of Christ. There are denominations called Disciples of Christ, Church of Christ, and Christian Church. The Mennonites and the Amish have a common origin and the Nazarene Church is derived from and has much in common with the theology of Methodism. The Episcopal Church is much like the Anglican Church of England. In addition to each of these, there are hundreds of varieties of "Independent" churches with no denominational affiliation. The list goes on, but the reader has by now gotten the point that the Church of today is splintered, divided and shattered even more than our poor, mythical friend, Humpty-Dumpty.

The Church is referred to as "God's building" and the "temple of the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 3). It seems however that it has become much more similar to a huge mansion comprised of hundreds of rooms, and that the various sects of Christianity have sequestered themselves in those separate rooms to the exclusion of others. Some of the rooms have fireplaces (they're "hot") and some air-conditioners (they're "cold"), but most of them are merely room temperature and tepid ("lukewarm"). A reading of Revelation 3:15-16 reveals what our Lord Jesus thinks of a lukewarm church. Remember,

too, that room temperature is what a body assumes when it dies.

That division in the Church is not at all what our Lord had in mind when he prayed to the Father:

My prayer is . . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20-23, emphasis added).

When Jesus prayed for our oneness of mind and singleness of purpose he had no intention that we would not have differences. He and the Father are unique persons, yet equal in all of their divine attributes and eternal purpose. They also differ in their respective roles in our salvation; the Father sent the Son, the Son earned our human righteousness and the Son died in our place. The elect also are unique persons, but our commonality is found in our origin (made in the image of God) and our eternal destiny. Our differences, our profound diversities, whatever they may be, must never be cause for disunity, disharmony and separation. Open debate and discussion over differences of opinion on issues with no eternal consequence is healthy and intellectually stimulating. However, at the end of the day, we should never allow the sun to set on any animosity we might hold for the one who holds a different opinion from our own. We remain finite creatures debating issues of finite importance, whose answers are often known only to our infinite triune God (Deuteronomy 29:29).

#### THE FALL

When the egg (the Church) became perched on its conical end upon so many walls, it was inevitable, by the sheer weight of the odds, that it would experience a fall. In Luke 11:17 Jesus was recorded as saying, "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall." Understandably, the context of that verse has to do with

Satan's realm, but the Church is no less vulnerable to the consequences of division. We, of course, are part of God's kingdom and the apostle Peter calls us a "spiritual house" in 1 Peter 2:5.

Divisions have arisen over doctrine, baptism, the sacrament of Holy Communion, forms of worship, editions and translations of the Bible, legalism, antinomianism, and most recently an attempt to bring some semblance of unity back to the Church through a movement called "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" (ECT). This latter controversy has even caused separation in the one body that most of us thought really "had it all together," the Reformed ranks. As a result of all of this division, separation, exclusion and schism, the "egg" has fallen and broken into many pieces. One must say with sad assurance that "all the King's men" won't be able to put it together again. The reason for this is the same reason that the infidels at Babel could not finish the tower; many of the leading King's men are speaking a different theological language.

I recall an incident in my early walk with Christ that troubled me greatly at the time but seems all too common as the years have passed. An elder at my church asked where I had been on a particular Sunday evening when I had missed vespers. I explained that I had been asked to speak at another church where I had shared my testimony. The elder then commented, "You apparently don't know what they believe." Ironically, sometime later that elder would leave our church and begin to attend another church much like the one he had disparaged. It then seemed to me that he also hadn't known "what they believe" and probably less of what he believed himself. That is sadly where too many Christians are in regard to their theological belief systems.

There was a time when the Church was held in high esteem in our land. When the Pilgrims settled in Plymouth the first edifice to be built was the local church. Those brave souls lived the first bad winter in that structure while they built their own homes. As civilization spread westward, churches were always built in the center of villages and towns. Right up to and

through the 1950s the USA had what Francis Schaeffer called a "Christian Consensus." Then, during the tumultuous 60s, religious thought seemed to become insignificant and peripheral. The re-establishing of the local churches in the suburbs and away from the center of the metro areas seems somehow subtly symbolic of that peripheral mindset regarding the faith.

As a result of the fall of significance that the Church has taken in the general public's estimation, it has lost its impact on the shaping of society. The "salt" has truly lost its savor and the winds of pluralism and tolerance of all religious views are snuffing out the "light." We are a country more defined by multiculturalism, secularization, apathy, and a disbelief in absolute truth (relativism) than "one nation under God." The unbelieving world sees those walls, and our building walls, not bridges, is counterproductive to the Great Commission. To paraphrase a thought of G. K. Chesterton on the notion of separatism: "The same walls that lock others out also serve to lock us in."

The world also sees the "civil war" within our "holy nation." We are using our orthodoxy, our straight and firm teaching like lances to run through the hearts of those brethren who disagree. We are beating plowshares into swords, and instead of cultivating *koinonia* we are waging war. Our battles are supposed to be against lies and the "father of lies" not truth-seekers. Instead of being "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" we've become as predatory as hawks and poisonous as vipers.

#### REFORMATION AND REVIVAL

When our "egg" fell and shattered into many pieces it became dysfunctional as a body with Christ at its head. It suffered a profound disintegration. The "fall" was not as sudden or precipitous as poor Humpty-Dumpty's. Rather it was protracted and insidious taking many years to complete its downward path promulgated by the gravitational pull of sectarianism. It was division that caused it, just as our Lord said it would. The King's men will not put it back together again. They don't even want to, but somehow and at sometime the

King will. It may come through a disaster, like 911, or the impending terrorist acts that we've been promised. It may come by way of religious persecution that will force us to band together in our commonality and forget our differences; but the Lord will see to it that his body is reunited. The Lord may judge the Church for its continued disharmony, for he judges those whom he loves when they are out of his perfect will. Unity, not disharmony is his stated will, as we have learned from the seventeenth chapter of John.

God, who made us, can put us back together if we will just forget our petty differences and look to our eternal purpose, the core beliefs that we all hold, the "yolk" and not the shattered shell. We may be diverse on the surface, but at the center Jesus is Lord and he died and rose again for his sheep. The yolk of an egg is where the elements and blueprint of a life are located; the DNA. The inert shell is merely a protective device. We have focused too long on the shell, that which "protects" and divides us from one another. It is time to refocus our attention on the yolk, the core of our Christian faith.

To speak of "reform" implies an original form. The Scriptures give us that form, that ideal. The apostle Paul reminds us that the Church is to

make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called, one Lord, one faith, one baptism: one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Ephesians 4:3-6).

In that passage of Scripture one sees the desired form of the Church. It's not a group of separate and competing denominations or body parts trying to outdo one another. It's unity and oneness. Diversity and division of labor is good and even necessary for the proper functioning of the body of any living creature. But there must be unity of purpose in the scheme of diversity.

The body is a *unit*, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form *one* body. So it is with

Christ. For we were all baptized into *one* body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given *one* Spirit to drink (1 Corinthians 12:12-13, emphasis added).

A further reading of the text in that chapter of Paul's letter to the Corinthian Church points out the need for diversity in the midst of the body of Christ; but not at the price of disunity. Every part of the body has a distinct role to play in the body's health and wellbeing. The heart, kidneys and liver all work in concert and do so under the direction of the brain. So, too, in the body of Christ there is division of labor on both an individual and corporate basis.

It is because of our disunity, not our diversity, that the Church has become dysfunctional as a unit and ineffective as the salt and light that we should be. We are as good as dead. We need a "revival" if we are to become the force the Church once was to turn the world upside down. To revive implies revitalizing something that was once alive but is now dead. God taught this lesson of revival to Israel as recorded in the book of Ezekiel.

The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley that were very dry. He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign Lord, you alone know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life'" (Ezekiel 37:1-5).

By reading the remainder of that chapter one finds that God did breathe life into those bones and "they came to life and stood on their feet—a vast army." That is, of course, a prophecy of a coming event, but the same Lord who will do that to Israel can revive his Church.

Reformation and Revival is exactly what the Church needs today. The Church needs CPR; Christ Producing Resuscita-

tion, Christ's Power of Regeneration, Christ Providing Revitalization. He is waiting to do that but he desires (not needs) our cooperation. In Revelation 3:20 we read a verse that is so often taken out of context and used in reference to evangelization of the unsaved. The context is one of Christ asking his servant John to write a letter to one of his churches (the Laodicean Church). There he says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

That is not a picture of our Lord standing outside the heart of a pagan, as it is so often taught. Rather it is a reminder to the Church of the twentieth century that he is standing outside the door of his own Church and he wants to come in to reform and revive us.

In the book of Zephaniah one reads of God's caveat concerning the coming of Jerusalem's destruction by Nebuchadnezzar and his urging that the Jews begin to unify before his wrath comes upon them: "Gather together, gather together, O shameful nation before the appointed day arrives . . . before the fierce anger of the Lord comes upon you, before the day of the Lord's wrath comes upon you" (Zephaniah 2:1-2). Looking ahead to the coming Day of the Lord we Christians should take heed of those words.

Finally, in Malachi one reads this plea: "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" (Malachi 2:10).

We were made in the image of our God. He is one in essence yet three in person; at once unity and diversity. To shatter that image, in the Church, like the fallen Humpty-Dumpty, is to stress our diversity instead of our unity. May God help us to refocus our vision on the reason for our existence.

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