

Comparison of the modern and early church religion essay



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Explaining the strengths and weaknesses of the early church, and how they compare to the church today; it is a very interesting topic since it involves the history of what early Christians did for the establishment of the Christian movement today. Looking into the Acts of the Apostles, so much can be learned on how people dedicated their lives to the church during that time.

A question arises then asking, what is the church? Many interpretations have been said concerning the meaning of the Church. These interpretations can be traced back when Jesus declared to build his Church upon the revelation by Simon Peter that, when he said Jesus is the Son of God (Matt 16: 18).

Montefiore believes; ' the church can be considered fewer than two aspects; as an organism and as an organisation, without organization, organisms die'¹. Therefore, what is this organism and how is it linked with the organisation to make a church.

To arrive at the better conclusion of this matter, I will be considering the book of Acts to get the a) background of the early church in Acts; and the b) explanation of what is the Church; c); strength and weaknesses of both the Early and Modern Church.

THE CHURCH DEFINED

The definition by Webster's editors says: ' A distinct body of Christians having a common faith and discipline'. In Greek language the word is translated as ekklesia, which means ' called out'. Therefore, there are couple of things to look for, for the church to be established. Faith, discipline, and standing out from the rest. These explanation of what the Church is, gives an idea that, there are certain elements involved for a church to be established. Arguably, it means it should be made of people who follow Christ, having one faith and being disciplined, already set themselves different from the rest of ordinary people.

THE EARLY CHURCH

' All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them' (Acts 2: 4). It was during the day of Pentecost which is believed the New Testament church was established. The Bible further explains that, those who were gathered during the day of celebration of Pentecost could not believe what they heard coming from the Christians who were filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in unknown tongues. But those who were gathered understood them, because they spoke in the languages. Unger comment that: ' the new age of the Church was foretold by our Lord Himself and was ushered in at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was given, received and deposited in the new people of God'.
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Chapter two of Acts verses (42-47), they explain what happened after Apostle Peter preached the good news about Jesus and the number of people who gave their lives to Christ, and repented from their evil ways. So this is the organism and the organisation, Montefiore was referring to, the Holy Spirit, which is divine and the people filled with this Holy Spirit to be an organisation.

The acts of the risen Christ by the Holy Spirit through the Apostles are prominent in the book of Acts. Evidence from this book shows strong biblical convictions held by the believers of the community in Jerusalem, also in the surrounding areas. This is how the early church began, marshalled by the Apostles and I will look into details, measures taken by these dedicated individuals in Acts working together to establish a church and compare them with the church of today.

WHAT STRENGTHENED THE EARLY CHURCH

BAPTISM

‘ Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number (Acts 2: 41). Jesus himself urged his Apostles to go to all nations and baptise those who believe the good news about his kingdom in water. This was taken seriously by the Apostles, as it was a badge for new believers for belonging to Christ; they did it in faith, even though further teaching came after baptism, it was their belief that any Christian soldier has the right to be given full proper uniform.

The Apostles did all this because people repented, showed faith, they received the Holy Spirit and it proved to unite them strongly and bring them closer to each other which was what they wanted.

It is a different issue with the church today as most believe in monitoring the ways of those who has given their life to Christ. The time spend trying to mould a new believer into a mature Christian is the same time lost to give the new believer the responsibility to recognise the important regiment he joined in Christ. Baptism it a seal to those who accepted Christ and it was done by the church in Acts to stabiliser new converts, but today it is not practised at the right time. Therefore, the new believers are not united with other and they end up being lost back to the world.

HOLY SPIRIT

According to the accounts of Acts, there is prove that, the people obeyed the Holy Spirit more than anything, and it gave them the unity as a community. Holy Spirit spoke (Acts 8: 29, 10: 19) and immediate response from those who were assigned by the Spirit to do something went on and accomplished the tasks as believers. Jews and Gentiles those who trusted in Christ were all given the Holy Spirit. This was so significant since at fist Jew's disapproved the Gentiles as God's people; but now because the Spirit dwelt in those who believed both are united and they were all called from indifference into unity to serve God by the Holy Spirit.

The church of today when looking back on how the church in Acts responded to the Holy Spirit it has some eye brows raised. This is so because there are so many denominations under Christianity and they all have their own

beliefs. So they all have different interpretation of the Holy Spirit impact in the church and some even do not pay attention to it at all. He promised to send a comforter to live amongst Christians and he will guide them in their everyday living. This is what held the church in Acts stronger since they believed Holy Spirit and God are one. But that is being missed within different Christian faiths today. Church members are controlled by their own understanding and intelligence, and those who claim to be controlled by the Spirit they always find themselves in dilemma of practical life and Spiritual life.

FELLOWSHIP

Examining the Acts of the Apostles, it is evident that a very strong fellowship was established between Christian believers in Jerusalem because of the love they had for each other (Acts 2: 42). In John 1: 6-7, explains the fellowship principle of Christian living and it the same fellowship the church in Jerusalem practised. They shared possessions, sold properties to care for one another's needs.

The fellowship of the early church consisted different forms to make sure that everyone was involved in unifying the church. Personal attention which involved encouragement and advice from other church members, one on one with those they brought to church. Furthermore, they met in homes so that others adjust to the new society. This led to a bigger and a welcoming church congregation fellowship, which everyone was used to one another and that strengthened the church.

Comparing what the early church practised in fellowship with the church today, not much difference but there is lack of commitment. Hardly members within the church fellowship in homes and if they do the number is always very small. No enthusiasm in encouraging and helping new converts to settle in with the new society.

WEAKNESS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Major unsettling concern with the church in Acts is the issue of favouritism. It is exposed by none Palestinian Jews who spoke against unfairness of daily share which was given out to church members. This caused arguments and division within church members who were united by faith in Jesus. Even today favouritism is noticeable in the churches across, either because people come from same country, continent or same denomination, and all this bring weakness in the body of Christ.

Another short fall from the primitive church is the extension of love that Jesus summoned his followers to show to their neighbours. It seems different with the church in Acts as the mutual love was first shown to those within the fellowship of the church. This in other way chased those who were willing to come to the church for the first time as it made them feel unwelcomed.

CONCLUSION

Explaining the strengths and weakness of the early church, compared to the church today is a very informative topic as it allows Christians to reflect on their purpose in the world. After consulting different sources concerning the topic, I have come to realisation that the early church was more profound in

making sure that the good news about Jesus was spread without compromise.

The teaching of the word about who Jesus is was so rich that, more and more people joined the church everyday. The fellowship of church members brought light to the community as it influenced their way of living. The church in the New Testament played their role to call out those who were in darkness to bring them to light which Jesus promised them if they love one another.

Comparing both the early and the church today, very important thing that should be learned is that the early church was so excited to be followers of Jesus and they were spiritually motivated. Christians today need that excitement to occupy their daily life to glorify Jesus because he is the source of life and the world needs him at this age.