

A Review of the Article, "[Christ Founded a Visible Church](#)" by Bryan Cross, "Called to Communion," June 7, 2009

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A. With Regard to the Church as the Body of Christ

1. I agree with Bryan Cross that the Church of which Jesus is the head is a [mystical or spiritual body](#) (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-31; Col. 1:18, 24; Eph. 1:22; 4:15-16; 5:23).
2. I agree with Cross that a distinction is to be made between the [Mystical Body of Christ](#) and the physical body of Christ, which was born of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:25; Luke 2:7), tortured (Matt. 26:67-78; 27:27-31; Mark 15:15; Luke 22:63-64; John 19:1-3), executed (Matt. 27:33-51; Mark 15:22-39; Luke 23:33-47; John 19:16-37), and buried (Matt. 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:23:50-56; John 19:38-42); that later was resurrected (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-49; John 20:1-29), which ascended into heaven (Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:1-11), and which now sits at the right hand of the Father (Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:54-56; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet. 3:22).

B. With Regard to Cross's Contention that Christ Founded a Visible, Hierarchically Organized / Governed Body

1. From the start of the Church in Acts 2:1-12, the Church at large was only partially visible. At that point the Church consisted of a mere 120 people (Acts 1:15), but the most important part of that body, the Head – Jesus Christ – was absent and invisible. He had ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9-11).
2. There is no evidence in Scripture that God intended or authorized the Church-at-Large to be [Hierarchically governed](#), certainly not in the way that the church headquartered in the Vatican is governed.
3. The following offices included in the Vatican Hierarchy are to be found nowhere in Scripture.
 - a. Pope
 - b. Patriarch
 - c. Cardinal
 - d. Archbishop
 - e. Priest
 - f. Subdeacon
 - g. Archdeacon
 - h. Acolyte

- i. Exorcist
- j. Lector
- k. Porter
- l. Abbot
- m. Sexton

C. What Evidence Do We Find in the New Testament?

1. There is no evidence in Scripture that Peter was the first Pope.
 - a. Jesus did not predict that He would build His church upon Peter in Matt. 16:18. What he said there was, "And I say to you, moreover, that you are *Petros* (stone, [4074](#)), and upon this rock (*petra*, [4073](#), large rock, bedrock) I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. The Scripture interprets who this rock is. Jesus was predicting He would build His church on Himself, the Rock.
 - 1) In Rom. 9:33 Jesus is the Rock of offense.
 - 2) In 1 Cor. 10:4, the people of Israel drank from a spiritual rock, and that rock was Christ.
 - 3) In 1 Pet. 2:8 Jesus is again identified as a Rock of offense.
 - b. There is no irrefutable evidence in Scripture that Peter ever lived in Rome. Some take his reference to "Babylon" in 1 Pet. 5:13 as a coded reference to Rome, but the text does say "Babylon," not "Rome." Certainly in the last book of the Bible, Babylon means Babylon.
2. While Jesus certainly assigned to Peter an important role in the Church, possessor of the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:19), there is solid evidence in the Book of Acts that, after he had used the keys of the kingdom to usher representatives of three different groups into the church, who will much later participate in the Kingdom as the Bride of Christ, Peter's prominence waned.
 - a. Peter did unlock the way for Jewish people to enter the Church (Acts 2:1-47).
 - b. Peter did unlock the way for Samaritans to enter the Church (Acts 8:14-17).
 - c. Peter did unlock the way for Gentiles to enter the Church (Acts 10:1-48).
 - d. Peter was miraculously released from prison (Acts 12:1-17).
 - e. But after the first 12 chapters of Acts, Peter almost vanishes. He makes an appearance at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:7-11), but after that, we hear almost nothing of Peter in the history of Acts. It was the Lord's half-brother James who gave the decisive push not to require Gentile converts to be circumcised, but to instruct them to abstain from four

- things that were especially offensive to Jewish people (Acts 15:13-29).
- f. From Acts 13:1-28:31, it is distinctly Paul who is the most important Apostle. He planted more churches than anyone else, and he wrote more letters that appear in the New Testament than any other NT author. He wrote 13 letters; Peter only wrote 2.
3. There is no evidence in the New Testament that the Apostles could legitimately pass on their apostolic authority to anyone else. They could pass on their Apostolic teaching, but not their Apostolic authority.
 - a. Jesus personally chose Twelve men to be His Apostles ("sent ones"). These choices are recorded in Matt. 10:1-4; Mark 6:30; Luke 6:12-16; Acts 1:1-2.
 - b. To be sure, Peter engineered the selection of Matthias to replace the departed Judas (Acts 1:15-26). But there is no record that Jesus ordered him to do so. And there is certainly no record that Jesus personally chose Matthias. Indeed, we never hear of Matthias again.
 - c. But there is abundant evidence that Jesus chose Saul, who became Paul, to take the place of Judas. His powerful conversion is recorded in Acts 9:1-22.
 - d. Time and again Paul wrote in his letters that he was an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1). Jesus confirmed his legitimacy as an apostle by giving him authenticating signs (2 Cor. 12:11-12).
 - e. There are, in fact only Twelve Apostles who will be recognized in eternity. Their names will appear on the twelve foundations of the wall of New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14). I am willing to wager a considerable number of shekels that the twelve names will include the name of Paul, and not the name of Matthias.
 - f. Once the Apostles died out, there was no church official or grouping of officials that had authority over the entire Church on earth.
 - g. Instead, authority seemed to go to the leaders of local churches, who, at the most, held some authority over an entire city (Timothy in Ephesus, 1 Tim. 1:1-7) or an entire island (Titus in Crete, Titus 1:5)
 4. The primary leaders of a local church were designated as elders ([*presbúteros*](#)) (Acts 20:17). The same group of men were also designated as overseers ([*epískopos*](#)) (Acts 20:28). Elders / overseers were appointed in each church (Acts 14:23). Paul's greatest fears were that savage wolves would arise to destroy the flock (Acts 20:29), and that certain elders would go on a perverse power trip to draw disciples after themselves (Acts 20:30). So Paul warned the elders in Ephesus to be on guard over themselves and over all the flock (Acts 20:28). Paul left the Ephesian elders with two resources: God Himself and the Word of God's grace (Acts 20:32). Over the centuries,

Paul's fears, unfortunately were well founded.

5. Additionally, there were men selected by the men of the church to oversee a necessary ministry that was catering to elderly Jewish women, but slighting Grecian women (Acts 6:1-6).
 - a. The Apostles did not want to dilute their time in serving the Word of God and in praying in order to serve Tables. So they asked the men of the church in Jerusalem to select seven men to oversee this ministry to women. These were prototypical "deacons," but that word is a transliteration, not a translation. I prefer the translated word, "Servants."
 - b. So Servants are to assist the Elders / Overseers of the church in making certain that ministries other than prayer and the Ministry of Teaching would not be neglected.
 - c. There is every reason to believe Phoebe was an unofficial servant of the church in Cenchrea (Rom. 16:1-2). She had helped not only the church there, but many other people, including Paul himself. So the office of Servant consists of men, not women. See also the qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:3-13.

D. Bryan Cross has a section entitled, "[Denial of Visibility is Ecclesial Docetism](#)."

1. He expresses it this way:
 - a. Denying the essential unity of the visible hierarchy treats the Mystical Body of Christ as though it is not actually and essentially a Body, because visible hierarchical unity is essential and intrinsic to a body. If a body ceases to be visibly hierarchically one, it ceases to be.
2. If we are to believe Bryan Cross, we should find at least one Scripture that dictates that the entire universal church should be subject to the Church headquartered in the Vatican in Rome, Italy. I find no such verse anywhere in the New Testament.
3. Cross has taken the heresy of Docetism, which stated that the physical body of Christ only seemed to be human, and misapplied it to the mystical body of Christ. That is his Vaticanized interpretation, not a Biblical interpretation.
4. To be sure, heresy and schism are damaging to the Body of Christ. But to assume, as Cross does, that the Body of Christ is co-terminous with the Roman Catholic Church is prideful heresy.
5. The universal Church is far bigger than the Vatican Church, the Orthodox Church, or the Protestant Church. Furthermore there are many members in good standing with the Roman Catholic Church, with the Orthodox Church, and with the Protestant Church who are not actually members of the Body of Christ. This is true, sadly, because these members are trusting in something

other than the shed blood of Christ for their salvation. And they are trusting in someone other than Jesus for their salvation.

E. The First Time the Mystical Body of Christ, Including its Head, will be Present in One Place at the Same Time will be the [Rapture](#) of the Church.

1. The passages that perhaps best describe this event are found in John 14:1-3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and 1 Corinthians 15:50-53.
2. Before He left His disciples, Jesus informed them that there were many dwelling places in His Father's house. He would depart from earth to prepare places for them there, much as a bridegroom would prepare a place for his bride prior to their marriage. If He left to prepare for them a place, He would return and receive them to Himself, that they might be with Him always (John 14:1-3). Personally, I believe these dwelling places are to be found in [New Jerusalem](#), described in considerable detail in Rev. 21:1-22:5.
3. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus" (1 Thess. 4:14). Thus, when Jesus returns to retrieve His [Bride](#), the [Church](#), from the earth, He will bring with Him the departed souls of [Church-Age](#) believers who have already died.
4. Those believers who have not died when Christ returns will not have an advantage over those believers who have already died (1 Thess. 4:15).
5. "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thess. 4:16). Thus the believing Church saints whose souls accompanied Jesus at His return will be reunited with their now-resurrected bodies.
6. Then, the living believers will have their turn: "Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess. 4:17a).
 - a. So, we who are living when Christ returns for His Church will be caught up together. We will be given resurrection bodies without having had to die first! This is further described in 1 Cor. 15:50-53.
 - b. The entire Mystical Church, including Christ, the Head, will be all together in one place for the first time. And we will be with the Lord!
7. Never again will we be separated from the Lord, our Head: "...and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17b).
8. The purpose of Paul's writing about this stupendous event is that of comfort. He concludes, "Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18).

9. So, the Mystical Body of Christ will merge into the Spiritual / Visible Body of Christ with its head, Christ, for the first time in history. And nothing will ever change that. There is therefore no need to speak of the universal Church in terms of being associated with the church headquartered in the Vatican in Rome, Italy, or with the Orthodox (Eastern) Church or the Protestant Church. There will be only one Church. Jesus' prayer for unity will finally have been answered (John 17:11, 20-21).

F. Conclusion

1. [Bryan Cross concludes as follows:](#)
 - a. We have provided evidence and argumentation here that Christ founded a visible Church, and that this Church is visible not merely because some of its members are embodied, and not because local congregations and denominations exist. The Church Christ founded is visible because, as His Mystical Body, it necessarily has an essentially united visible hierarchy; this is the hierarchy of bishops and priests united under the episcopal successor of St. Peter, the visible head appointed by Christ.
2. A [word study of the word "Body"](#) (*sōma*, [4983](#)) reveals that there is not a single instance of the word "body" that is used in the sense that Bryan Cross would have us believe.
3. I believe Cross has failed to prove his point. There is insufficient Biblical evidence to accept his point. He has quoted Catholic theologians and Popes, but he has failed to provide us with Biblical documentation that proves his point.
4. The Scriptures trump church tradition, whether that teaching be Protestant, Orthodox, or Roman Catholic. Cross's contention has not passed the standard of Biblical evidence.