

THE COMMISSION WAS GIVEN TO THE CHURCH

By O. W. Taylor

The nature and the performance of the duties set forth in the Commission require the idea that the Commission was given to the church.

If given to the apostles only, the Commission ended when they died. But the duties enjoined were to continue "even unto the end of the world." This called for an organized body to carry on through the centuries after the apostles and after other workers died.

There was a church before the Commission was given. "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom" (John 3:29). "The bridegroom" was Christ. "The friend of the bridegroom" was John the Baptist. What was "the bride," if not the church in its initiatory stage? Was "the bride" non-existent when "the friend of the bridegroom" said, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom," referring to the time then present? Evidently the bride was existent. This same body was later called "the church which was at Jerusalem."

Jesus gave "commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen" (Acts 1:2). One of these was the Commission. The apostles were "set ... in the church" (1st Corinthians 12:28). The apostles corporately considered were the initial church. To it the Commission was given.

The duties in the Commission could be performed "unto the end of the world" only by an organized body carrying on when individual workers died. Only such a body could furnish the necessary workers and support for the program. Left to people unorganized, the work would not and could not be done. The body which meets the specifications is the church.

"Teach" carries, of course, an individual responsibility. But to "teach all nations," and that "unto the end of the world," requires the idea of an organized body, the church, sponsoring the program.

"Baptizing them" is enjoined. If this was entrusted simply to individuals, then no church as an agency in relation to it is in view in the Commission and no baptism into a church is indicated. But this conflicts with 1st Corinthians 12:13, which teaches that the New Testament idea is baptism into a church. It is logically unthinkable, therefore, that Jesus commissioned men to baptize independently of the church. And the duty of making and baptizing disciples among "all nations" to "the end of the world" requires the concept of church sponsorship of the program which brings the duty into exercise.

"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Admittedly, one of the things included here is the Lord's Supper. With men reasonably instructed in the Word of God, the proposition calls for no argument that no individual has the right and authority to administer the Lord's Supper on his own. Then neither does he have the right and authority to baptize on his own. These duties and the other things in the Commission were entrusted to the church as the organized and authorized body to carry on the program through the centuries.

Only the church is the sponsoring body; logically, it's in the concept of the Commission considered as a whole.