

Church vs Faith?

There are these pesky false dichotomies floating around in the culture which often go unchallenged by otherwise thoughtful people. One of these is the dichotomy between “religion” and “spirituality.” While it is true that a person may be “religious” without being particularly “spiritual,” and vice versa, it does not follow that these things are mutually exclusive.

Another version of this dichotomy, popular among so-called “non-denominational” faith groups is that between “organized religion” and “a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.” Again, it is certainly true that one can be very involved with some form of “organized” Christianity without being in a truly “personal relationship with Jesus Christ,” and vice versa: And, again, it does not mean that these two realities are mutually exclusive.

The experiences which seem to sanction these sorts of dichotomies are, likely, real experiences of hypocrisy and/or superficiality among “church people.” And, for certain, there are people who belong to a particular church for no more reason than it affords them social status or provides some sense of community or for some other need apart from a desire to grow in closer communion with God.



Valid and troubling as these experiences may be, they don’t prove that “organization” is the enemy of truth faith. It is an extremely selective reading of the Gospels and the New Testament which creates this false dichotomy. Jesus is actually quite specific when speaking about the Church, and the Apostolic response indicates a sense of robust organization! Consider the following selection:

Mt. 16:18ff “*You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church. . . I will give you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you bind on*

earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Mt. 18:17 “*If [your brother who sins] refuses to listen to [two witnesses], tell the church.*”

Acts 2:42 “*They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and prayers.*”

Luke 24:35 “. . . *he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*”

Hebrews 19:25 “*Therefore brothers, since through the blood of Jesus we have confidence of entrance into the sanctuary by the new and living way he opened for us through the veil, that is, his flesh. . . We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near.*”

1 Timothy 3:2ff “. . . *a bishop must be irreproachable . . . deacons must be dignified*”

1 Timothy 3:16 “*You should know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth.*”

1 Timothy 5:17 “*Presbyters who preside well deserve double honor, especially those who toil in teaching and preaching*”

Titus 1: 5ff “. . . *appoint presbyters in every town.. a bishop as God’s steward must be blameless. . . holding fast to the true message as taught so that he will be able to exhort with sound doctrine and refute opponents.*”

Not only do we have abundant evidence of organization and structure in all of these passages, but there is also an emphasis on the “assembly” and gathering for worship as evidence of communion and faith in Christ. Sometimes St. Paul’s word to Timothy about the church being the “pillar and foundation” is translated “pillar and bulwark:” A bulwark is a protective, containing structure and a pillar is one that holds something up. The Church is there to provide protection of the true faith from error and every whim of man to make of it whatever he wants.

For a superior explanation, go to the following link wherein Bishop Bob Barron reflects on this topic.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLta2b9zQ64