

CHAPTER II.

*There can be no more excuse for this confusion of ideas respecting the meaning of ecclesia, than respecting **metanoeo, pistuo, or baptizo**—No word can have two diverse or opposite meanings—The laws governing the definition of words, etc.—The classical use of the term **ecclesia**.*

I CAN not for a moment grant that there is the least excuse for this confusion of ideas concerning the meaning of the term the Omniscient Christ selected to designate the institution he originated and established on earth, and with which he made it the duty of every one of his disciples to unite. If we can not unmistakably ascertain what he meant by this term, how can we claim that it is possible to know what he meant by any other term he used in commanding our obedience, as **metanoeo, pistuo, baptizo**. We can assert it with reference to **every word** Christ used with the same propriety we can with any **one word**. If a hopeless ambiguity attaches to any one or all the terms expressive of our duties and obligations, then it is certain that we are forever released from all efforts at obedience. It is a reflection upon, if not a profanation of the character of Christ and the Holy Spirit, to suppose that either would select words of double or ambiguous meanings by which to teach us our duties. Words were invented to **express**, not to **conceal** ideas. Christ certainly designed to convey some definite idea by every word he employed. For a word to fill this office it must have been originated to designate some one specific notion, which we call the **meaning, or definition**, of the word. This meaning is always placed first in our lexicons, and is called the primary, natural, real, or physical meaning, and **is**, and can be **but one**. Christ must have designated some one specific act, designated some specific duty, or inculcated some specific idea when he enjoined obedience, or instructed us with respect to duty by every word he used; and just as certainly as it is possible for us to ascertain the exact meaning of the terms in which our **moral** duties are enjoined, so certainly is it possible for us to ascertain the meaning of the terms in which our **positive** duties are enjoined—**baptizo** as well as **metanoeo**, and **pistuo**.

The question arises, how can we ascertain, without doubt, the real meaning of any word? We usually refer to a lexicon, which, if standard, is good authority, but there is an ultimate authority to which all lexicographers go for their definitions, and that is—the use of the term by the best writers of the language in the age in which the word is used.

Now in ascertaining the meaning of the term under discussion, let us turn from the creeds of churches and the opinions of men, which we have found in hopeless confusion, to the original sources of information, and we will learn that the cause of the confusion is not attributable to any conceivable ambiguity in the term **ecclesia**, but to those teachers, who wrest the term, as they do the Scriptures, to uphold their false theories.

Now the sources of information are two—I. The general use of the term, by the Greeks themselves, which we call its classical usage; 2. Its general use by Christ, and the Holy Spirit, who selected the words used by the inspired writers.

Before doing this we should familiarize ourselves with a few, at least, of the leading rules

of interpreting language, which I collate from Morus, Ernesti, and Blackstone:

“1. Every word must have some **specific idea or notion** which we call **meaning**. Were not this so, words would be meaningless and useless. In the Scriptures there is unquestionably assigned to every word some **idea or notion**.

“Sec. 14. “**Every word must have some meaning** [*i.e.*, definite, specific]. To every word there ought to be assigned, and in the Scriptures there is unquestionably assigned, and some **one idea or notion**. This we call the **meaning or sense** of the word...

“2. The **literal** sense of words is the sense which is so connected with them, that it is first in order, and is spontaneously presented to the mind, as soon as the sound of the word is heard.

“3. The sense of a word can not be **diverse** or multifarious at the same time and in the same passage or expression, and, we may add, in the same letter or narrative. There can be no certainty at all in respect to the interpretation of any passage, unless a kind of necessity compels us to affix **a particular sense** to a word, which sense **must be one**, and unless there are special reasons for a tropical meaning, **it must be the literal sense**.”

“The first important diversion or distinction of words in respect to their meaning, is into **proper** and tropical, *i.e.*, **literal** and **figurative** or (better still) **primary** and **secondary**.”—*Morus, indorsed by Stuart.*

I may add here the reason Morus assigns for using a word tropically or figuratively, as—(1.) For the sake of variety in expression, and to this species of tropical language belong **metonymy, synechdoche**, and other similar tropes; (2.) “Tropical words, especially metaphors, are used for ornament.” It will thus be seen that a figurative use of a word **does not create a new definition—a different sense**—but is the word **troped, i.e., used in an artificial manner**.

Morus tells us that the most common figures used in our Scriptures are **metonymy**, and **synechdoche**. As I prepare this little book for the masses—the common people—I am confident they will hear me gladly if I explain these figures so they can know them wherever they meet them in the Bible—while the explanation has a direct bearing upon the two principal terms that enter into the discussion of the Lord’s Supper.

I. Metonymy is the use of one word for another—literally, a change of name.

EXAMPLES.—These abound throughout the Bible.

I. “Jerusalem and Judea, and all the region round about Jordan, went out and were all baptized of him in the Jordan,” etc. Here the **places** that contained the people are put for the **people**, as we say of a drinking man, he drank three glasses or bottles, or cups, the thing that contains is put for the thing—liquor—that is contained. A notable example, “On this rock will I build my **church**”—church instead of kingdom; or, if we understand that **one** of the constituents—a church—of the kingdom is put for the whole, it will be by—

2. **Synechdoche**—literally, a change of place. By this figure the **whole** is put for a **part**, or the **part** for the **whole**; one person or thing for the whole class, as the genus for the species; **man**, for all men, mankind—the **ox**, the horse, and for the whole species; or the species for the genus, as the bee, the fly, for warms and multitudes of those insects. (See Isaiah vii: 18, 19.)

In these expressions—“The Indians hunt the buffalo, the bear, and the wolf.” Man tames the horse, the ox, the mule, and cultivates the potato, the apple, and the melon; the **genus** is put for individuals in great numbers. So in the Scriptures we read that “Christ loved the **church**,” that he is “the Head of the Church.” One church is used for multitudes of the same kind, the

genus for all contained under it. I would not call this the **generic** or **collective** use, but figurative, as will be more fully noticed. With these principles of interpretation, let us inquire for **the classical meaning of ecclesia, universally translated “church”** in our version, when referring to the Christian institution. **Ecclesia**, from **ek**, out of, and **kaleo**, to call.

Liddell & Scott:

“An assembly of citizens summoned by the criers—the **legislative Assembly**.”

The citizens here called out from the people, **demos**, were the qualified voters only; and the qualified voters constituted a specific body—**organization**—for their names were enrolled, and it had its officers. The **ecclesia**, in Greece, then meant but **one specific** thing, and that an **organization**.

Donegan:

“**Ecclesia**—an Assembly of the people convoked by the heralds [never a mob]; also the **place** of Assembly.”

But, as above, the people, convoked by their officers, were only those authorized to exercise the elective franchise, and these constituted a **specific body**—the legislative Assembly. By metonymy, only could it be used for the house in which the assembly met, as when we call the **house** in which a church worships, the church.

Dean Trench says:

“**Ecclesia**, as all know, was the **lawful** assembly in a free Greek city, of all those possessed of the rights of citizenship, for the transaction of public affairs. That they were **summoned**, is expressed in the latter part of the word. That they were summoned out of the whole population, a select portion of it, including neither the populace, nor yet strangers, nor those who had forfeited their civic rights, this is expressed by the first. Both the **calling** and the **calling out** are moments to be remembered, when the word is assumed into a higher Christian sense, for in them the chief part of its peculiar adaptation to its august sense lies.”

The term “Ecclesia” has as **definite** and well understood meaning to be the Greeks as the “House of Representatives” does to us, or “the Assembly” would to a Virginian’s ear. The free cities of Greece were governed by **three judicial bodies**:

1. The **ecclesia**—assembly—which was composed of all the qualified voters of a free city, whose names were duly enrolled, and an officer selected by the body. At Athens, the ordinary fixed assemblies were call **ecclesia**, of which there were four in each presidency; and an extraordinary assembly summoned for an especial purpose.

2. The **Boula** (Council) of five hundred, who were a committee of the **ecclesia** to prepare measures for that **assembly**, corresponding to our Senate.

3. The **Dikastries**, or Jury Courts.

The assembly being a legal legislative body, duly registered as such, was a permanent body, and at all times an **ecclesia**, whether in session or adjourned, as is the House of Commons of England, or House of Representatives of the United States. Of the powers of the ecclesia:

“Besides the legislative powers of the assembly—ecclesia—it could make inquisition into the conduct of the magistrates, and in turbulent and excited times exercised a power resembling that of impeachment, as in the case of Demosthenes and Phocion.”—*North American Cyclopaedia*, p. 736.

It will be seen that all matters that affected the public interest and the welfare of the

people, civil or religious, came under its cognizance.

The meetings of the **ecclesia** were usually held in the theaters of the free cities, as that of Dionysius at Athens and at Ephesus, as the regular sessions of our Legislatures are held in the capitol buildings of our State.

From these facts we learn:

1. That the terms **ecclesia**, the assembly, and the Council, Boule, in Greek, were used to designate **specific legislative** bodies, and were never applied to a lawless “mob” or promiscuous gatherings of the multitude for any purpose. The Greek has other terms to designate these, as **demos**, the populace; “**oklos**,” the crowd; **sustrophe**, concourse; and **panegyrea**, general assembly—like those which convened at the public games.

2. We learn that writers and commentators are not justified in saying that it is sometimes applied to a riotous crowd or lawless mob, or a gathering of any sort for any purpose; **for it is never so used**. In its classical signification it is used three times in the nineteenth chapter of Acts.

Paul preached in the free city of Ephesus: “And the word of the Lord powerfully increased and prevailed;” where Demetrius, a silversmith, thinking his craft in danger, made a great outcry, together with his fellow-workmen, and filled the city with confusion; and having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, rushed into the theater. This was the appointed place for the meetings of the **ecclesia**, and the reason why he took them there, and it may, at this time, have been in session. If not, it convened as was its wont and duty upon the outcry. “And some cried one thing and some another,” and the **ecclesia** was confused by these varied cries, while no definite charge was brought to their notice for them to take cognizance of. Now, mark, it was not the **ecclesia** that was riotous, tumultuous; but the **oklos** (crowd) and not the **ecclesia**, that the officer of the ecclesia—the secretary—quieted. See v. 35.

He informed them if they had any definite charge against any man, the Courts were held for that purpose, it was not the province of the Ecclesia; but if they sought any thing further—*i.e.*, concerning the weal of the city, etc., it would be settled in the lawful **ecclesia**. The Ecclesia was responsible for public tumults, insurrections, etc., and the officer appeals to the crowd to be quest, and disperse; for, said he, speaking for the Ecclesia, we are even in danger of being accused about the tumult of to-day, there being no cause by which we can excuse this concourse—*συστροφης*, not *Εκκλησια*. And having said this, he dismissed (adjourned) the Assembly—**ecclesia**—not the **sustropes**.

Stephen in his speech before the Sanhedrin used the term in its classical sense when he said:

“This was he who was with the **assembly**—ecclesia—in the wilderness.”—*Acts vii: 38*.

That was a specific organized body of men—the Jewish nation. All the instances in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament are of the **classical** use of this term, and refer to specific organized bodies, never to indefinite unorganized bodies. From the above examination of the classical use of the term, I feel justified in concluding that “ecclesia” is used to designate one specific body—*i.e.*, the Assembly of a free city of Greece, and never a promiscuous gathering, much less a riotous crowd or mob. It is like **Boule**, which is never used except to denote the senate or Council of five hundred, as we are wont to say “The Senate,” “The House,” when alluding to our State Legislature.

If ecclesia literally means any thing else in the New Testament than an **organized local assembly of adults**, its modified use must be learned from its New Testament usage alone.

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The Center for Theological Research
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, Texas
Malcolm B. Yarnell, III, Director