

Loving The Church

“You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honour.” | James 3:18, MSG

Loving the church can be hard.. Frankly, at times, she can seem like a big, fat disappointment.

Infighting. Divisions. The failure of leaders and the apathy of congregants. The assimilation to culture. A preoccupation with prestige and power. Intolerance. Liberality.

Sometimes the church is hard to love.

“It is clear that the church regularly breaks our hearts, disappoints, and even damages us. Both history and our current headlines reveal a church that can be a deeply flawed, sinful, and unhealthy institution, marred by acts of injustice, corruption, abuse, misogyny, and oppression. The contemporary [American] church is wrecked with bickering and division, celebrity worship and unaccountable leaders, false and shallow teaching, and a Christian industrial complex formed around greed and vanity.” | Tish Harrison, A Church Called Tov

Negative experiences often lead people to ‘give up on church’. They decide they will ‘follow Jesus’ but reject the church. Their solution: to walk an individual and untroubled path, to become a solitary lighthouse bravely resisting the wild seas alone.

And I get it. I do.

It's an unsettling reality that many people who've left the church and moved away from Christian community have suffered real disappointment and hurt at the hands of the church. For many, their view of the church has been (justifiably) tarnished by their negative experiences within it.

People can be very wounded by the church, unfortunately, because it's made up of imperfect people who often mess up.

But here's the rub.

We are the church.

All of us, together, collectively, communally.

There's not *ourselves* and then, over there, *the church*. There's not *me*, in my own personal little faith bubble, and then, over there, the raging, incompetent screw-up of a *church* that I, personally, have no connection to (and neither do I want to).

There aren't *some Christians* who just love doing church and other Christians who, well, it's just *really not their thing*.

'An individual Christian does not a church make.'

We are the church

Christianity is, by definition, collective, and communal. There is no church, without all of us.

Too often we separate out Jesus and 'the church' in our minds as if they're two different identities. We say we love Jesus but we're less enthusiastic about his people.

But the church is Jesus' body. Loving Jesus means loving the church too. It's part of him and he's part of it. He died for the church, for his people, and it's in his death and resurrection that we are brought together in community.

Jesus said that he would build his church, purchased with his own blood, and of which he is the chief cornerstone (Matthew 16:18, Acts 2:28, Ephesians 2:20). His language is organic, inclusive, and corporate. He is in the house-building business and we are each his individual stones, selected and fitted together, according to his good pleasure (1 Peter 2:5).

We therefore can't say we love Jesus but we hate his people/body... it's simply incongruous.

Loving the church isn't an optional extra to our life of faith. It's an intrinsic part of it, with all its joy, pain, and disappointment. She is us and we are her.

3 Reasons To Love The Church:

1. Because Jesus Asked Us To (And Because He Loves Her)

Jesus brings real people, diverse and divided in life, into common union together, into relationship, into the messy, untidy reality that is the church, not because they are worthy, but because Jesus died for them and that is enough.

It's around the Passover table, over the first Christian communion, and right before Jesus was betrayed, sentenced to death, and then crucified, that he gives his disciples a new commandment to live by once he is gone.

"...love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another." | John 13:34-35, ESV

By loving one another as he has loved us, all the world will know that we are his disciples. The world will see your love for each other and know, without even having to ask, that you are followers of the king.

Love isn't always easy, but it is the more excellent way. And it's the way that Jesus has asked us to take.

First, we were loved, now we love.

Sure, we will have to work at it at times (and 1 Corinthians 13 is full of pastoral advice on how to go about this) but, quite simply, loving each other – loving the church – is what Jesus has asked us to do.

He loves her and he wants us to love her too.

2. Because The Church Is The Hope Of The World (Despite Her Flaws)

Around that communion table, Jesus could see the seeds of the church – his church – that was soon to be born. His small band of followers represented the expansive and diverse family that God would build through him, for the glory of His name and in pursuit of His purpose.

"You are my ambassadors", Jesus had told them, "and behold, I am with you, even until the end of time." (Matthew 28:20).

From the dark soil of an empty tomb, the seeds of Jesus' church sprang forth, bringing new life and hope.

The church – full of saved sinners – is the place that tells of God's goodness and faithfulness, and His enduring love for humanity.

The church is the place that speaks hope, shining the light of the gospel into a dark world.

The church is the place where broken and damaged people find healing and redemption, basking in the warmth of God's radical grace.

The church is the heart of God's kingdom mission, spilling over into the world and showing that a different way is

possible: life that gives life, in abundance.

We love the church because, despite her flaws, she is the hope of the world, the place where people finally come home.

3. Because We Were Made For God's Community

We were made for community and we grow and are nurtured in community. (Yes, we are wounded in community but it's also in community that we heal. *"Healing might not come from the community where the wounding took place, but community is needed for healing nonetheless."* | Rich Villodas)

It was in the very beginning that God said, 'let us make humanity in our image and after our likeness.' To be with God and to be like God, together: this is what we were made for and the purpose of human existence. This is why we all feel that deep longing to belong, why we continually search for meaning in the mundane. God has placed eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

We aren't really 'Christian' in its fullest sense unless we're doing life together within the God-community we were created for. Otherwise, we're just like a random toe or finger, disconnected from a body and essentially useless (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) (in this analogy, that is; please don't read that to be saying 'you are useless'!).

The Apostle Paul has this to say about the body of Christ: *"A body is made up of many parts, and each of them has its own use. That's how it is with us. There are many of us, but we each are part of the body of Christ, as well as part of one another."* (Romans 12:4-5, CEV)

Each one of us, brought together, makes up the body and, as Ephesians 5:29 comments, "None of us hate our own bodies. We provide for them and take good care of them, just as Christ does for the church."

This is what we were made for! Relationship with God and relationship with His people. Church people are kingdom people, living in a fellowship under King Jesus, with lives that are “connected to things before the creation of the world and extending far into eternity.” (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

We love the church because she is the community of God.

Finally...

Sometimes the church can feel hard to love. Sometimes we rub up against people who don't exactly show Jesus as we think he ought to be seen. *Sometimes we are those people.*

But for those who have been disillusioned by the church, please know that she is full of people who really are the real deal; people who love Jesus, love his people, and are working every day in his kingdom mission with sincerity and authenticity. I know, because I've met them!

So, don't give up hope in the church, in finding your place in it, and in loving her, despite her flaws.

She is us.

We are the church.

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The Church | A Woman Of

Valour

(Not a reader? Take a listen instead ↓)

This article is dedicated to the memory of William Tyndale (c 1490-1536), an active and passionate Christian writer and translator, whose historical influence on the translation of the Bible into English cannot be overstated. Tyndale was convinced that the Bible alone should determine the practices and doctrines of the church and that every believer should be able to read the Bible in his own language *"The church of Christ is the multitude of all those who believe in Christ for the remission of sins, and who are thankful for that mercy and who love the law of God purely, and who hate the sin in this world and long for the life to come."* – William Tyndale

In my recent article, '[The People Of The Kingdom](#)', I noted that **the church is the tangible evidence of the kingdom of God**. Church people are kingdom people, living in a fellowship under King Jesus, with lives that *"are literally connected to things before the creation of the world and extending far into eternity"* ([Ecclesiastes 3:11](#)) (Matter Of The Heart). By looking more closely at how the Bible describes the church, we will also see what the advancement of this kingdom of God looks like, in reality, demonstrated in the lives of those men and women who gather together as the church.

What Does 'Church' Mean?

Our English language Bibles were translated from manuscripts written primarily in two languages; Hebrew (in the Old Testament) and Greek (in the New Testament). The translative history of the Bible is a fascinating journey, from an academic and historical perspective, and is well worth exploring. You can [read more about the translation process here](#).

In the New Testament, the word translated into English as *church* is not actually a translation or even a transliteration of the original Greek word. The translators of the first English language Bibles generally elected to use the English word *church* (which had emerged first as the word *kirk* and finally evolved through the centuries into the word *church*), as an English equivalent of the original Greek word. The first usage of this word 'church' in English was as a building in which religious meetings were held, but eventually it came to be used for the people in the building too. By the time translators began translating the Greek manuscripts into English, it had been in accepted use in English for a long time. In all truthfulness, however, it wasn't an accurate translation of *ekklesia*, which is the original Greek word.

The original Greek word used in the New Testament – *ekklesia* – is a compound of “*ek*” (out of) and “*klesis*” (calling), a derivation of “*kaleo*” (call). A literal meaning would be “*a calling out*” or “*the called out.*” An *ekklesia* was originally a select civil body, summoned or convoked for a particular purpose and the word, in and of itself, didn't have any religious meaning attached. In Acts, the word *ekklesia* is used of a riotous mob (Acts 19:32 and 41) and also used to refer to a lawful gathering in Acts 19:39.

Ekklesia should perhaps be more accurately translated in English as *assembly* or *congregation*. However, the King James Version, the 'authorised' (and most commonly read) translation for many years, renders it *church* some 76 times, *churches* 36 times, and *assembly* three times. Most other translations follow the KJV's example. Essentially, the translators chose to replace *ekklesia* for another Greek word (*kuriakon* which, by this time, had already made its way into English as 'church').

Despite this, it would be true to say that the word *church* is now an extremely established and recognisable word in our modern English, and it has been used for centuries as the English equivalent of *ekklesia*, however erroneous the original

translative methods were.

But What Does Church *Really* Mean?

Today, most people would understand the word *church* to mean one or all of three things:

1. A **place of worship** (the original meaning of the word *kuriakon* ('*belonging to the Lord*'))
2. A particular **denomination or religious group** within Christianity (when attached to a name, for example, an *Anglican Church*)
3. A **body of Christian believers** (*the church*)

The primary goal, when trying to understand the use of the word *ekklesia* (in the context of the Bible's original meaning) is not necessarily to reinstate a truthfully accurate translation of the original word (although that would, of course, be a more proper process of translation) but to correctly understand the **meaning** of the original word. We know that words change meaning over time and also that it's not the word itself that is important, but how we understand and use that word. Do we talk about and describe the church in the same way, today, that the first-century authors did? (For the sake of continuity, we will discuss the biblical meaning of *ekklesia* in this article using the established English equivalent *church*).

The Bible never speaks of the church in the sense of a building or organisation. Neither does it speak of the church in the sense of a particular denomination. The biblical definition of church is actually about the people – those who place their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 12:13). These people are the global community of believers who gather together in 'local expressions of church'. The Apostle Paul describes this community like the human body, a living thing – made up of real people (1 Corinthians 12:12). The New Testament authors don't describe

many churches but one, simply expressing that '*where two or three are gathered in my [Jesus'] name, there am I among them.*' (Matthew 18:20).

In the early years of the church, these gatherings were known, for example, as *the church that met at Corinth* (1 Corinthians 1:2), or *the church at Ephesus* (Ephesians 1:12), communities acknowledged to be the one body of the Lord 'scattered abroad' (Acts 8:1-4, 1 Peter 1:1). The church is about people – **the people are the church, the *ekklesia*** – called out, connected in relationship by Jesus Christ and assembled together for a purpose.

There's a very real sense that many Christians are returning to this original meaning behind the word used by the New Testament writers; that is, to view and speak of the church as an *organic identity*, made up of 'people who are called and gathered together as a community in Jesus'.

A 'Called Out' Community

In the first few chapters of Acts, we read of the birth of the church in a rush of wind and fire; a pivotal moment in history where people begin responding to the call of the gospel and the announcement of Jesus as the risen king and saviour. Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14-36 'cut many of the listeners to the heart' and his life-changing teaching regarding Jesus caused many to receive his words with gladness, believing that Jesus was both the risen Lord and [Christ](#) (Acts 2:36). This belief and repentance of their sin was demonstrated by them being baptised – 3000 people in one day!

Acts 2:42-47 describes how these individuals began gathering themselves together as a community 'called out to follow and serve King Jesus'. We begin to get a sense of the reason for the use of the word *ekklesia* by the apostolic writers to describe the formation and purpose of this one body of believers.

Throughout Acts, there are examples of the believers meeting together as a community and the purpose of these gatherings can generally be summarised by five key elements:

To honour God and His Son – ‘**worship**’

To grow community – ‘**fellowship**’

To develop personally – ‘**discipleship**’

To provide service to others – ‘**ministry**’

To share the Good News – ‘**evangelism**’

Being ‘called out’ is a common theme in the New Testament:

- Jesus came to **call** sinners (Matthew 9:13, Mark 2:17, Romans 8:30).
- By God’s [grace](#) and mercy, He **calls** people from among Jews and Gentiles to be His people (Romans 9:24-26).
- The believers in Corinth were **called** into fellowship with Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 1:9).
- God **calls** believers to [peace](#) (1 Corinthians 7:15).
- The **calling** is by the grace of Christ (Galatians 1:6).
- The believers in Galatia were **called** to [freedom](#) (Galatians 5:13).
- Paul implored the saints at Ephesus to walk in a manner worthy of their **calling** (Ephesians 4:1, 1 Thessalonians 2:12).
- The believers at Colossae were **called** in one body (Colossians 3:15).
- God **calls** believers into His own kingdom and glory (1 Thessalonians 2:12).
- God **calls** believers to conduct their lives in holiness (1 Thessalonians 4:7, 2 Timothy 1:9, 1 Peter 1:15).
- God **called** the believers in Thessalonica by the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14).
- God **calls** believers out of darkness and into His marvellous light (1 Peter 2:9).

These passages all cite the original greek word *kaleo* (‘to call’ or ‘called’) and have to do with a believer’s relationship with God and their connection to His eternal

purpose. We can also see the connection here with the use of the Greek word *ekklesia* to describe the collective community of 'called out' people – believers that assemble together.

Metaphors For The Church

Other metaphors are used throughout the Bible to describe the community of believers, one of which is that believers form a spiritual 'house' – living stones to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

Another metaphor is the human body, a living thing – made up of real people (1 Corinthians 12:12). Paul devotes a whole chapter in the book of Corinthians to the principles and purpose of 'church' and how each 'member' of the body is to be valued for the diversity and contribution they bring to 'the body'.

This metaphor of a body is further expanded as yet another metaphor, that of a particular kind of body, the body of a bride; the fiancée and intended wife of 'the lamb' (John 3:29, Revelation 3:12). We are given to understand from Ephesians 5 that the relationship between Jesus and the church wasn't modelled on the first marriage but, in fact, it was the other way around. God had the church in mind from the very beginning and our understanding of marriage is therefore modelled on the relationship that would exist between Jesus and his bride. Therefore, if we want to understand how the church, as the bride, relates to Jesus, we are to look to marriage and the examples given in both the record of creation in Genesis and Paul's writings in the New Testament. Marriage is our human way of experiencing and understanding how we, together as one body, relate to Jesus as his church.

"A wife should put her husband first, as she does the Lord. A husband is the head of his wife, as Christ is the head and the Savior of the church, which is his own body. Wives should

always put their husbands first, as the church puts Christ first. A husband should love his wife as much as Christ loved the church and gave his life for it. He made the church holy by the power of his word, and he made it pure by washing it with water. Christ did this, so he would have a glorious and holy church, without faults or spots or wrinkles or any other flaws. In the same way, a husband should love his wife as much as he loves himself. A husband who loves his wife shows he loves himself. None of us hate our own bodies. We provide for them and take good care of them, just as Christ does for the church, because we are each part of his body. As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother to get married, and he becomes like one person with his wife." This is a great mystery, but I understand it to mean Christ and his church." | Ephesians 5: 22-32, CEV

The Birth Of The Church

We are to think of the church – this community of believers – as a woman, a woman whose very life and existence were framed by the death and resurrection of a man. Through this man's death and sacrifice, she is created and at his resurrection, she becomes a living creature. We see the obvious echo in the story in Genesis of the creation of Eve from Adam's side:

"The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him." The Lord God formed out of the ground every living animal of the field and every bird of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man named all the animals, the birds of the air, and the living creatures of the field, but for Adam no companion who corresponded to him was found. So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, and while he was asleep, he took part of the man's side and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the part he had taken out of the man,

and he brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one will be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." | Genesis 2:20-23, NET

What an eloquent phrase: *'bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh'*! Adam looks at this new creation and exclaims *"this is my very own self, from my very own body"*. She is man's counterpart, not merely in feeling and sense – his flesh – but in his solid qualities. We also have another significant phrase – *'taken out of'* – echoing *'the call'* that goes out in Acts 2. Here in Acts, we read of people being *'taken out of the dominion of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of light and life'*; visible proof of the power of the Gospel to bring about a new creation. Without the death and resurrection of Jesus, there would be no church, no new creation, no bride. The insistence of the critical reality of the resurrection of Jesus being connected to the fulfillment of the gospel promise was the firm teaching of the first century Apostles and this remains the solid framework of the existence of the church today.

"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel." | 2 Timothy 2:8, NIV

The woman in Genesis is the man's possession, not in the sense of ownership, but rather in the sense of belonging. She is from him and of him, they belong together and are as one body. Paul comments on this being *'profound'* and that ultimately, he is referring to the church's relationship with Jesus (Ephesians 5:32).

A Woman Of Valour

The word used of Eve at her creation is the Hebrew word *ezer*, which is translated as *'helper'* in English. However, our understanding of *helper* falls far short of the original sense

of the word, which is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe God as a helper to His people or of a king to his subjects. The primary idea of the word lies in '*girding*', '*surrounding, hence defending*', to '*protect or aid*'. The counterpart, therefore, to the man is "*a woman of valour, whose worth is incalculable*" (Proverbs 31:10).

We have this extraordinary *woman of valour* fleshed out in more detail in Proverbs 31:10-31; a famous passage celebrating '*the virtuous woman (or wife)*'. We would perhaps understand *virtuous* to mean '*having or showing high moral standards*', but the original Hebrew words *eshet* and *chayil* used in these verses don't convey virtue or virtuousness in the same way we would understand '*virtuous*' today. The Hebrew word *eshet* is the construct form of *isha* (woman) and *chayil* connotes bravery (Psalm 76:5); capability (Proverbs 12:4); triumph (Psalm 118:16); or strength (Psalm 84:7). In the 17th century (when the first English Bibles were translated) *virtuous* still suggested the French '*virtu*', which at the time meant '*manly*' or '*brave*.' A better translation of the Hebrew words *eshet chayil* is '*woman of valour*' (as translated by the Tanakh Jewish Bible (1917)). This *virtuous woman* is the same woman who is also, in the King James translation, '*clothed in strength and honour*' (Proverbs 31: 25).

If marriage is modelled on the church and her relationship to Jesus, then it's not such a stretch to recognise the ideal woman in Proverbs as a detailed portrait of what the well-functioning, organic body of the church looks like.

"She obtains wool and flax, and she is pleased to work with her hands. She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar. She also gets up while it is still night, and provides food for her household and a portion to her female servants. She considers a field and buys it; from her own income, she plants a vineyard. She begins her work vigorously, and she strengthens her arms. She knows that her merchandise is good, and her lamp does not go out in the

night. Her hands take hold of the distaff, and her hands grasp the spindle. She extends her hand to the poor and reaches out her hand to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household, for all of her household are clothed with scarlet. She makes for herself coverlets; her clothing is fine linen and purple. She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes. She is clothed with strength and honour, and she can laugh at the time to come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, and loving instruction is on her tongue. She watches over the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness. Her children rise up and call her blessed, her husband also praises her..."
| Proverbs 31: 13-22, 23-28

What a remarkable description of the capable, industrious, joyful reality of the organic church; a living, breathing *woman of valour*, of which every believer is a member and valued part.

The Bride And The Lamb | The Story's Resolution

Yes, Christians are stones making up a house (1 Peter 2:5).

Yes, Christians are branches connected to a vine (John 15:1-7).

Yes, Christians are subjects and citizens of a kingdom (Ephesians 2:19).

Yes, Christians are children of a heavenly Father (1 John 3:1).

Christians are all these things. But these are still metaphors for the individual. It's only when we consider marriage, as a metaphor of the church and the king being brought together, as one, that we understand that the Christian life isn't intended to be experienced as individuals but as a collective

community. The church – the *woman of valour* – is created from the body of Jesus, who was crucified, buried and raised the third day, just as the first woman was taken from the first man. Together, Jesus Christ and the church are one body. She, the church, is the bride of Jesus and He, Jesus, is the spotless lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:22-23, Ephesians 4:4, 2 Corinthians 11:2, Acts 20:28, Colossians 1:24, Revelation 13:8).

The first two chapters of Genesis are where we first discover God's eternal purpose for humanity. The last two chapters of Revelation tell us of the glorious resolution of God's story. And Paul's words in Ephesians assert the *"supremacy and centrality of Jesus Christ in all this, together with his counterpart, the church, which should dominate our understanding of everything physical and spiritual."* – Frank Viola

"Christ did not die just to save us from sins, but to bring us together in community. After coming to Christ, our next step is to be involved in community. A church that does not experience community is a parody, a sham. Simply put, the purpose of the church is to stand for God's eternal purpose. In short, wherever the church gathers together, its guiding and functioning principle is simply to incarnate Christ." – Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church*

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him the glory. For the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." | Revelation 19:7, BSB

"The heart of her husband has confidence in her, and he has no lack of gain. She brings him good and not evil all the days of her life." | Proverbs 31:11-12, ESV

Author's Comment: A Further Brief Note Regarding The Translation Of 'Church'

The English language was first spoken as a Germanic dialect, known as Old English or Anglo-Saxon, beginning in northern England some years after the Anglo-Saxon conquest (circa 449 AD). The earliest written Old English, however, did not appear until approximately 800 AD. Probably sometime around 500 AD, the people in northern England started referring to a building erected for worship as a *cirice*, later, *chirche*, and finally, a *church*.

By the time William Tyndale translated the New Testament from Greek to English (known as the "Tyndale Translation", 1525 AD), the word *church* had been in use for centuries. Throughout these centuries, the state church had maintained its power over the people through bloody crusades against resistance groups for the sake of "doctrinal purity." It was claimed that the Apostle Peter had started the church (based on Matthew 16:18); and therefore the church should be lead by a clergy and not placed in the hands of any "congregation or assembly." Not only that, prior to the fourteenth century, a complete Bible in the English language, for the common people, didn't exist. Even for modestly educated clergy, the Bible was mostly inaccessible – available only in the Latin language and in large folio copies of two or three volumes. These Bibles were ridiculously expensive, limited in number and difficult to access. For the most part, the clergy had to rely on the small portions of scripture that were included in prayer books.

In his translation of Matthew 16:18, Tyndale rightly translates the Greek word *ekklesia* as *congregation*, as opposed to the word *church*, signalling a return to a correct understanding of the organic reality of the church. Tyndale's accurate translation of this one word threatened the power and control of the entire state church system. Knowing Tyndale's translation was soon to become public, to be read by the common people in their own language, presented a real threat to the power of the religious institution of the day. Tyndale

was told to amend his translation. Despite being threatened by the religious leaders of his day, William Tyndale would not revoke his translation of the word *congregation*. Ultimately, he was betrayed, sentenced to death, and burned at the stake in 1536.

In 1604, King James of England and Scotland commissioned a new translation in response to perceived problems or flaws with earlier translations which did not "*conform to the ecclesiology and reflect the episcopal structure of the Church of England and its beliefs about an ordained clergy*". Instructions were given to the translators that the new version would conform to the ecclesiology of the Church of England (which, by now, had broken with and was directly in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church). As such, certain Greek and Hebrew words were to be translated in a manner that reflected the traditional usage of the church, now long-entrenched and in common use. Ecclesiastical words such as *church* were to be retained and not to be translated as *congregation*.

The King James Authorised Version was published in 1611 and quickly grew in popularity. It still remains a significant and popular English translation today. Unfortunately, however, the inaccurate use of the word *church* to replace the original *ekklesia* became firmly embedded in most translations with many readers unaware of the problematic nature of its translative history.

Can we unravel and reverse nearly 500 years of linguistic and cultural understanding that now surrounds the word *church*? Can we edit and reprint millions upon millions of editions of the Bible in English, which, in truthfulness, used a word that was an inaccurate representation of the original? Should we withdraw every copy of errant English Bibles from circulation, simply because it contains the word 'church'? Is it possible to determine what was genuine translative prerogative or suspect ecclesiastical bias, then or now? The answer is clearly 'no' to all these questions.

A better solution, perhaps, and one worthy of investing our energy and resources to, is to rediscover the original meaning

that the New Testament writers had in mind – the organic reality of a community of believers – and to speak, think and believe this of the church today, recognising that wherever the church gathers together, its guiding and functioning principle is simply to incarnate Christ.