

**The Church's One Foundation**  
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**2 Corinthians 5:6-17**

<sup>6</sup>So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—<sup>7</sup>for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup>Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup>So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. <sup>10</sup>For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.

<sup>11</sup>Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences. <sup>12</sup>We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart. <sup>13</sup>For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup>For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. <sup>15</sup>And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.

<sup>16</sup>From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. <sup>17</sup>So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

**1 Corinthians 3:10-17**

<sup>10</sup>According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. <sup>11</sup>For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup>Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—<sup>13</sup>the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. <sup>14</sup>If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

<sup>16</sup>Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? <sup>17</sup>If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

The author of the lyrics of this morning's hymn is the Reverend Samuel J. Stone, an Anglican priest of the Church of England. This hymn is one of over fifty hymns written by Stone and one of a very specific collection of twelve, known together as *Lyra Fidelium*. Stone was a dedicated priest to his congregation yet he "was known more as a religious poet than as a 'strenuous parish priest.'"<sup>1</sup> In *Lyra Fidelium*, however, the poetic and pastoral were both in full force.

The collection of twelve hymns was intended as a teaching tool on each of the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed. Today's hymn was written about the ninth article: "I believe...in the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints." As a preface to the collection, Stone wrote:

Most clergymen are aware how many of their parishioners, among the poor especially, say the

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ds-churchofchrist.org/manuscripts/one\\_foundation.html](http://www.ds-churchofchrist.org/manuscripts/one_foundation.html)

Creed in their private prayers. And they cannot but feel how this excellent use, as also its utterance in public worship, is too often accompanied by a very meagre comprehension of the breadth and depth of meaning contained in each Article of the Confession of Faith.

Such a feeling first suggested to the Author the probable usefulness of a simple and attractive explanation of the Creed in the popular form of a series of Hymns, such as might be sung or said in private devotion, at family prayer, or in public worship.

Prose expositions indeed of every kind are not wanting, from the great work of Bishop Pearson downwards, but these are more adapted for the student than for the general worshipper, for education rather than for devotion; and there can be little doubt but that the poetical form is more likely to be effectual in securing an abiding place in the general mind, and also in exercising an influence upon heart and life.

To this end the Author set about the composition of the following Hymns, and though, now the work is done, he is painfully sensible that he has not reached the point either of fulness or simplicity at which he aimed, he humbly trusts that GOD will make them nevertheless of some use in His Church.

A short prose Summary of the truths contained in each Article has been added, to render the world more complete by supplying some unavoidable omissions in the Hymns.

The testimony of Holy Scripture has also been adduced to authorise the doctrine and sentiment of almost every line, and to shew the oneness of the truth of the Bible and the belief of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

Stone was also known as a man of great conviction and great loyalty to the church. He hints at this in the last line of his preface, saying his aim is “to shew the oneness of the truth of the Bible and the belief of the Church.” The hymn was written in 1866. “In 1860 a volume entitled ‘Essays and Reviews’ caused controversy in the Anglican Church. It questioned the historical accuracy of Scripture.”<sup>3</sup> In 1861, a bishop of the Church, named John William Colenso, stationed in Natal, South Africa, was advocating a number of ideas which were counter to the teachings of the mother Church, including the support of this volume and support of an 1859 theory of a scientist named Darwin. A Bishop Gray of South Africa, with many supporters, took it upon himself to try, and subsequently depose and excommunicate, Bishop Colenso. Among Bishop Gray’s supporters was the Reverend Stone. So, while the hymn is part of a larger work about the Apostles’ Creed, we’ll see reference to this controversy as well.

But, before we begin with the hymn, in my study on it, I discovered I misspoke last week and would like to make a correction. In referencing the Church of Luther’s time, I spoke of how it was the one and only church. The Anglican Church, also known as the Church of England, had been separate from the Roman Church since the sixth century, a full thousand years earlier, and the Eastern Orthodox Church separated in 1054, about five hundred years earlier. To be clearer, for Luther in Germany, there was only one church - the Roman Church - but outside of Germany other bodies were functioning as church in ways different than the Roman Church and had been doing so long before Luther. Now that that is

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<sup>2</sup> <http://lyrafidelium.com/lyrafidelium.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://songsandhymns.org/hymns/detail/the-churchs-one-foundation>

out of the way, back to “The Church’s One Foundation.” Somewhat ironic, yes?

For each of the twelve hymns, Stone added a “Summary of Truths” confessed in the specific article of the Apostles’ Creed. For the ninth article, Stone listed the following: “I believe that the Church of Christ is, has been, and will be one and the same: that it is *holy* in respect of (1) its Author and End, (2) the vocation of all the baptized, (3) the true saints within it: that it is *One*, by unity of origination, of faith, of hope, of charity, of sacraments, of discipline: that it is *Catholic*, as being universally disseminated, as teaching all truth, as possession [sp? possessing?] all graces: that its truly sanctified members have *communion* with the Holy Trinity, with the Angels, and with all Saints on earth and in Paradise.”<sup>4</sup> [bold and italics mine] His devotion to and faith in the church are abundantly clear in this summary.

Stone originally wrote seven stanzas; six are represented in the five verses we sing.<sup>5,6</sup> Many Scripture references can be attributed to influencing each of the verses; unfortunately, we don’t have time to address them all here but I am glad to direct you to resources should you want to do further study.<sup>7</sup> Certainly, many, many can be found to support the theological premises of the hymn. What we *can* do today is look at the Scripture passage most often associated, 1 Corinthians 3:10-17 (this morning’s second lesson), and this morning’s first lesson, 2 Corinthians 5:6-17.

“The Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord.” Paul says in his first letter to the church at Corinth, “For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.” We, as Presbyterians, aver in our Book of Order that all we do in worship and service, and even discipline, points back to Christ. Paul continues with both a beautiful permission and admonition: “Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw - the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done.” A foundation does not a building make; we are each called to help with building upon that foundation. Whether we get it right or

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<sup>4</sup> <http://lyrafidelium.com/lyrafidelium.html>

<sup>5</sup> Verse 1 is the same; verse 2 is the same; the original verse 3 is eliminated; verse 4 becomes our verse 3; verse 5 becomes our verse 4; the first half of verses 6 and 7 become our verse 5

<sup>6</sup> The eliminated verse is:

The Church shall never perish!  
Her dear Lord to defend,  
To guide, sustain, and cherish,  
Is with her to the end:  
Though there be those who hate her,  
And false sons in her pale,  
Against or foe or traitor  
She ever shall prevail.

<sup>7</sup> [www.ds-churchofchrist.org/manuscripts/one\\_foundation.html](http://www.ds-churchofchrist.org/manuscripts/one_foundation.html)  
<http://lyrafidelium.com/9lyra-thechurch.html>

wrong will be revealed at our judgment; fear of judgment should not deter us from building. If we, as good Presbyterians, do what we do with an eye toward Christ, then we have done our best.

“She is His new creation by water and the Word,” Stone writes. Did you hear our assurance of pardon in our first lesson? “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” In our baptism and through our gathering around the Word, the Holy Spirit works among us, cleansing us and revealing to us, re-newing us. Not forgetting the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, we can jump ahead; Stone writes, “One Holy Name she blesses, partakes one Holy Food.” The Church is united through baptism, the Word of God, and the Lord’s Supper together - with a message like this, this hymn may make a repeat appearance on World Communion Sunday. The second verse affirms the unity of the church in this way as well: “her charter of salvation one Lord, one faith, one birth.”

Back to the first verse: “with His own blood He bought her and for her life He died.” Paul, in explaining his convictions and the rightness of boasting in them says, “For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.” And back to last week’s atonement, we see here clearly that financial theory of atonement, of Christ’s buying our salvation with the price of his life. Lest we take lightly our charge as the church, we are reminded of the great cost of her birth. And should we forget not only our charge but also our own holiness as those created in God’s image, as those set aside for God’s special purposes, Paul reminds, “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you?...For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple.”

We come to the trial of the church, and a likely reference to the situation with Bishop John William Colenso, in verse three. “Though with a scornful wonder this world sees her oppressed, by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed.” I mentioned this was written in 1866; there is good reason it is in the hymnal we use, published in 1990, and why it is in the planned new hymnal for 2013. Sadly still relevant are oppression, schisms, and heresies. Stone laments how some have chosen to build upon Christ’s foundation, as Paul puts it in the second letter to Corinth. Beyond his own sorrows, Stone suffers with each outside criticism brought on by the challenges to the church’s doctrines. But he does not end with lamentation; he continues, “Yet saints their watch are keeping; their cry goes up, ‘How long?’ and soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.” Neither death nor sorrow shall have the final word - with Christ, hope prevails amidst any and all trials, challenges, and injustices. Verse four affirms this hope. “Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war, she waits the consummation of peace forevermore; till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest, and the great church

victorious shall be the church at rest.”

Until that time comes, Stone closes with two verses which have become our final one. “Yet she on earth has union with God the Three in One, and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won: O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we, like them, the meek and lowly, may live eternally.” Paul says it this way: “So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord - for we walk by faith, not by sight.” We trust that, with the gift of faith, we are united with the saints who have gone on before, the great cloud of witnesses as we like to call them, and we trust, too, that we will one day all be united, away from these bodies and with the Lord. Until that time comes, we each must choose with care how to build on Christ’s foundation.

Let us pray: Lord, might we never forget that we have been created holy that we might build upon your foundation. Amen.