

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The six phrases of the hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16 as they apply to the church may be summarized briefly as follows:

1. God the Son manifesting Himself in and through His body which is on the earth. (Col. 1:24–27; Eph. 1:22–23).
2. God the Holy Spirit vindicating the Resurrected Christ in and through the assembly. (Jn. 16:7–11).
3. God the Father making known His manifold wisdom and grace unto the principalities and powers by means of the assembly. (Eph. 3:10; 2:7).
4. The assembly making known the mystery of the gospel among all nations. (Eph. 3:5–8; Rom. 16:25–26).
5. The assembly functioning as a godly witness before the world. (Jn. 17:21; 1 Cor. 14:24–25).
6. The assembly being received up in glory at the rapture of the church. (Col. 1:27; 3:4; 1 Cor. 15:51–52).

It should be noted that the problem of chronology disappears as the hymn is correctly applied to the local assembly, as summarized in the six statements above. Thus Paul traces the purpose, witness, message, and destiny of the church! It could be said that 1 Timothy 3:16 provides the most comprehensive summary of the “mystery” aspects of church truth that can be found in the New Testament.

The problem of the use of the ambiguous relative pronoun can also be explained. Certainly the logical antecedent of this pronoun is “Christ” or “God the Son” (v. 15). But the very fact that Paul did not make the subject explicit permits the possibility of a wider application to Christ and the church. In other words, all six phrases have “Christ” (or “God”) as the subject, but the significance of these phrases has direct bearing and application to the local church. Thus what we have is a series of six parallelisms in

which the present tenure of the local church is analogous to that of our Lord Jesus in the days of His earthly life and ministry.

This interpretation also explains why the death of Christ is not mentioned in the hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16. Certainly the death of Christ was of utmost significance to the church because God purchased the church with His own Blood (Acts 20:28). But the emphasis in 1 Timothy 3:16 is upon the life and witness of the Lord Jesus, and by application, the life and witness of the church. Thus the omission of any statement concerning the death of Christ is easily explained.

To this writer's knowledge, 1 Timothy 3:16 has never been interpreted from a consistent, dispensational viewpoint, apart from the writings of Carlton Helgerson. Helgerson mentions 1 Timothy 3:16 as applying to both Christ and the church:

The local assembly must see itself for what it is in God's purpose. It is here to exemplify the mystery of godliness. Of the God-Man, Christ Jesus, it is written: "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (1 Tim. 3:16). His Body's tenure parallels this – manifesting God now and one day soon being caught up in the rapture.¹⁶⁰

In a series of articles that appeared in the Voice Magazine (I.F.C.A.), Helgerson made further mention of the mystery of godliness:

Neither should we be hesitant in accepting what the Lord has revealed about the local church as the current incarnation of the mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16). We are to allow Him to manifest His life in body-coordination, interpersonal relationships, and true holiness.¹⁶¹

A summation of God's purpose in the local church is in 1 Timothy 3:15–16. There the Apostle defines the company of believers in Ephesus as "the house of God which is the assembly of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (v. 15). Knowing what God has said on this matter is an incentive to correct behavior and a boost to the morale of any young Timothy. The truth, once perfectly manifested in Christ, continues to be

¹⁶⁰ Helgerson, Church Truth, p. 48.

¹⁶¹ Helgerson, Church Truth – Articles as They Appeared in the Voice Magazine, p. 3.

mirrored as “the mystery of godliness” in the local assembly; whose present tenure is in this respect analogous to that of our Lord Jesus in the days of His flesh.¹⁶²

Helgerson then applies the six phrases of the hymn to the local assembly. It is interesting to note that his application, though not identical, is very similar to the application that has been proposed in this thesis:

1. Then, in Christ, God was manifested in sinless flesh and a holy human nature. He now wills to yet manifest Himself in our humanity despite our fallen nature (1 John 4:17).
2. Luke tells us that Christ was filled with the Holy Spirit and led by the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1), and in Romans 1:4 it is written, “And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness...”. It is to the members of the body of Christ that the Spirit attests His witness (Rom. 8:16), and “by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body... now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Cor. 12:13,27).
3. Angels attended Christ’s incarnation, birth, testing in the wilderness His agony in Gethsemane, His resurrection, and ascension. The local church is under close observation by angels, too (1 Cor. 11:10; 1 Pet. 1:12; Eph. 3:10).
4. Christ was made known to Gentiles: wise men came from the East after His birth, Roman soldiers heard, the Syrophenician woman called upon Him, and at His death the centurion exclaimed, “Through the faithfulness of local assemblies many nations now hear of Him; the influence is world-wide (Rom. 1:8; 16:19).
5. There were those who believed on Christ when He was on earth. So, even now, there are those in the world who credit the local church with being true, respect the church, and believe its message (1 Thess. 1:8).

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 13.

6. When our Lord's ministry was concluded, He was taken up into heaven. The rapture (1 Thess. 4:17; 1 Cor. 15:52) will terminate this dispensation's primary witness as the believers are transported to glory. (His miracles, crosswork, and resurrection are omitted. It was by His crucifixion and bodily resurrection that we were brought into this grace! Nor are we enjoined to duplicate the miracles. The particulars listed stress manifestation of a life rather than overt accomplishments).¹⁶³

Pastor Helgersen concludes with this precious statement:

The local church is for the glory of God and it is here that it may function as a body that evidences the power and indwelling of the life of God. The local assembly is to be seen as the manifestation of Christ in its locality.¹⁶⁴

Without controversy this mystery, which in other ages had been locked up in the loving heart of God, is indeed great! The realization of the glory and the greatness of this mystery would have stirred Timothy and the Ephesian church to that godly conduct which pleases Christ, the Head of the assembly, God blessed forever!

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 13–14.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 14.