

“Revised Ritual of the Christian Church”

(1901)

A. A. Bright

Until the close of the Civil War, black Christians worshiped in the same church as their white masters did, were received into its fellowship, and were ministered to by white pastors, although in worship they were often required to sit in galleries set off from the main room of the church by a railing. Children of slaves were gathered up by a Sunday school teacher and taught about the Bible, and some were even taught to read.

After Lincoln emancipated the slaves in 1863, and blacks were free to go into the world as free citizens of the United States, they often sought to express their new freedom by building their own independent, local black churches, often on the same property as the white church.

Eventually, some of these black congregations organized themselves into a conference.

By 1866, a well-respected Christian leader, J. W. Wellons, introduced a resolution at a meeting of the North Carolina and Virginia Conference requesting the appointment of a committee to help the black Christians with plans to organize conferences, ordain deacons and elders, and license certain of their own people to preach.

Within a decade, black Christians had organized more than fifty churches, three conferences, and ordained forty ministers. By 1892, they had established a high school at Franklinton, North Carolina. And by 1900, many new churches had been established and the number of ministers increased, with more young men asking to be licensed. New church buildings of better quality were built, and most congregations had Sunday schools for Bible study and religious education.

Conferences were formed and soon organized the Afro-Christian Convention, composed of all the conferences of the black Christian churches. The high school in Franklinton had become Franklinton Christian College.

In 1901, A. A. Bright, soon to be field secretary for the southern division of the Afro-Christian Convention, answered the need in the black churches for a “Church Ritual” giving a brief history of their churches, a description of the fundamentals of the Christian church, basic rules for the organization and function of the local churches, the most fundamental theology, and words to hymns.

Preface

The Colored Christians have been needing a Church Ritual, gotten up for their use, that would give them some of the names of the fathers of their Church, to which they could refer in after days. This Church has struggled hard for existence against many opposing obstacles, but God has given it a better day.

Brethren, take this little book, and in the name of God, go forth and Christianize the world.

Yours for Heaven,

A. A. B. B. D.

[A. A. Bright]

Revised Ritual of the Christian Church

The Christian Church among the Colored people was originated from those who had been members of the white congregation before the surrender of the Southern Confederacy. After peace had been declared they began to congregate for the purpose of worshiping God. Their white brethren heard of them, and sent Revs. W. M. Wellons and W. M. Hayes to gather the scattered brethren together in a Conference. This assembly came together in the city of Raleigh,

N.C., November 10, 1867. The following congregations were in the organization: Christian Chapel, Pleasant Grove, Swift Creek Chapel, Raleigh, Pleasant Hill and New Berne.

The following preachers and delegates were present: Revs. William H. Hayes and Samuel Foy. (J. J. Jeffreys and W. H. Hayes were ordained, and Samuel Foy and J. J. Jeffreys were licensed.) Delegates: John Kent, N. Horton, Berry Hank, Monroe Watson.

This Conference has had a steady increase. It established a college at Franklinton, N.C., in 1880, under the auspices of the North Carolina and Virginia Conferences. Its first president was Rev. George Young, of Carolize, N.Y. Rev. Wilson, of Philadelphia, and wife, were great leaders in the establishment of this school for the uplifting of the young men and women of the Christian Church.

The Christian Church adheres to the following principles:

- (1) Christ, the only head of the Church.
- (2) The name Christian to the exclusion of all party or sectarian names.
- (3) The Holy Bible or the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments our only Creed or confession of faith.
- (4) Christian character or vital piety, the true Scriptural test of fellowship or church membership.
- (5) The right of private judgment and the liberty of conscience the privilege and duty of all—upon Bible doctrine.

Chapter I

The Christian Church is composed of all who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and teach repentance through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

- (2) Though he may belong to some other denominational Church, yet if he has been converted by the Son of the Living God, he is a Christian, and God accepts of him as one of His.
- (3) God sent His only begotten Son into the world to establish one Church, not many; and all men who have been converted are brethren and members of this Church, of which Christ is the head.
- (4) The Church is spoken of in the Scriptures as a household of which God, the Father, is the ruler, and such should not be divided against itself.
- (5) All the principles and workings of the Church should be in harmony with the Scriptures, so that members may be brought together in one body.

Chapter II

Church Rules

It is the duty of every church to select a pastor to serve them in the holy things, and to preach to them the unsearchable riches of God's grace.

- (2) The members shall provide for the support of the pastor, and shall pay their salaries in their monthly meetings, in which all the members are required to be present.
- (3) No member who shall neglect to pay his or her salary dues for three consecutive meetings is a member in good standing, and before he or she can be restored to membership he or she must pay the arrearage.
- (4) The members shall adhere to the decisions of the pastor, who shall ever make his decisions in accordance with the Word of God.

(5) The members shall meet weekly, and give support of the pastor's table, that he may be able to give all of his time to the preaching of the Gospel and looking after the needs of his flock. This amount shall not be included in his salary.

Now concerning the collection for the saints: "As I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye: Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." —*Cor. 16:1, 2.*

For the Scriptures saith: "Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn, and the laborer is worthy of his hire." —*1 Tim. 5:18.*

For it is written in the law of Moses: "Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care of the oxen!" —*1 Cor. 9:9.*

(6) The preacher's salary shall be three dollars for every male member annually, and two dollars for every female member. Children whose parents have to pay their salary dues, may pay such amounts as the members agree upon.

Chapter III

Reception of Members

A person may become a member of the church upon profession of his faith in the Lord Jesus. He shall come before the altar while a hymn is being sung. All candidates should be instructed in regard to the responsibilities of the church membership, of supporting the pastor, and the expenses of the church.

Q. (1) Have you sincerely and heartily repented your sins?

Q. (2) Do you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world?

Q. (3) Is it your purpose through grace to live a godly life?

These questions being answered in the affirmative, the minister shall state the fact, and there being no objection, he or she becomes a member.

The Resurrection of the Dead

The Scriptures are clear on the point of the resurrection, both of the righteous and the unrighteous. The statement is plain, and though a man may try to satisfy his unbelief, yet it is true.

(2) Jesus Christ is our authority. He said unto Mary and Martha that "I am the resurrection and the life," and He could not be mistaken.

(3) The doctrine of the resurrection was not entirely new, because when Jesus spoke of it to Mary and Martha, Martha replying, said: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection of the last day."

"For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth him all things that himself doeth: and will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son; that all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoreth not the Son, honoreth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come unto condemnation, but is passed from death into life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live; for as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself. And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man. Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in

their graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” —*John 5:20–29*.

God hath appointed a day when He shall judge all the nations of the earth, and shall separate the good from the bad. Jesus Christ will sit on the throne, and before Him will be gathered all the nations, both great and small.

“When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory, and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them from one another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from his goats.” —*Matt. 25:31, 32*.

Administration of Baptism

The sacrament of baptism shall be administered by an Elder or Bishop, and it should not be delayed.

(2) The person or persons should present themselves for baptism, should stand in front of the minister while he shall read the following passages of Scripture:

“Then the eleven disciples went away into Gallilee into a mountain, where Jesus had appointed them; and when they saw him they worshiped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth, go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” —*Matt. 28:16–20*.

“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.” —*Mark 16:15, 16*.

After reading a suitable passage of Scripture, and the singing of an appropriate hymn, prayer should be offered; then the candidate should be led into the water. The minister, standing in the water, shall raise his right hand and say: “In obedience to the command of my Lord and Master, and upon the profession of thy faith, my brother (or sister), I baptize thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.”

Administration of the Lord’s Supper

The Lord’s Supper should be served at least four times a year, making it three months between times.

(2) The most suitable time, perhaps, is on the Sabbath, directly after the sermon, of which notice should be given beforehand, that every member of the congregation may have his or her mind and heart properly prepared for this holy communion.

The elements should be set apart by prayer and thanksgiving, after which the minister shall break the bread before the people, saying in this manner: “Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He break it, and said: ‘Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. This cup is the New Testament in my blood. This do ye as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me.’ ”

After which a collection should be taken for the poor.

Deacons

It is plain from the Scriptures that the Deacons are distinct officers of the Church. Their duty is to supply the wants of the pastor, and take charge of temporal affairs of the Church.

- (2) They should make suitable arrangements for the support of the pastor, and assist in administering the sacrament.
- (3) One of the Deacons shall preside in the absence of the pastor, and shall strictly adhere to the rules of the Christian Church.
- (4) They should counsel with the pastor in the government and spiritual affairs of the church, and conduct the public worship of the church when there is no one of higher authority present.
- “Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, which are at Philippi with the bishops and deacons.” —*Phil., ch. 1.*
- “Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued; not given to much wine; not greedy of filthy lucre.” —*1 Tim. 3:8.*

Licentiates

A Licentiate is one licensed to preach the gospel as a probationer, until he shall give full proof of his ability to teach efficiently the great doctrine of salvation.

- (2) Great care should be taken that the candidate for license possess the moral and intellectual qualifications necessary to fit him for the responsible position to which he aspires.
- (3) He shall therefore possess an unblemished Christian character, and a good English education, and be recommended by the church of which he is a member.
- (4) He shall be examined on the doctrines and principles of the Christian Church, so that there shall be no doubt as to his qualifications to preach in the Christian Church.
- (5) He shall be examined on the following branches, viz.: Reading, Spelling, Writing, Geography, Arithmetic, Grammar, Philosophy, History of the United State, Elements of Rhetoric and the Bible.

The Laying of a Corner-Stone

Wherever God’s house is erected it should be marked in obedience unto Him who has enabled us to select a place in severance to His Holy name.

- (2) “And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.” —*Neh. ii:18.* “Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. We will go into his tabernacle; we will worship at his footstool.” —*Ps. cxxxii:3–5, 7.* “Go up to the mountain and bring wood, and build the house, and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the Lord; And the Lord stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did the work in the house of the Lord of Hosts, their God.” —*Hag. 1:8, 14.*

Apostle’s Creed

“I believe in God the Father, Almighty maker of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead, and buried. He descended into hell; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, the Father Almighty. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.”

Jesus before Pilate

“Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him; and the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on his head; and they put on Him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I found no fault with him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe; and Pilate saith unto them, Behold this man! When the chief priests therefore, and the officers, saw him, they cried out saying, Crucify him! crucify him! Pilate sayeth unto them: Take ye him, and crucify him, for I find no fault in him. The Jews answered him: We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God. When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he was the more afraid; and went again into the judgment hall, and sayeth unto Jesus,” etc. —*St. John xix:1*.

Jesus Quieting the Storm

“And when he was entered into a ship his disciples followed him; and behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves; but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us, we perish. And he saith unto them, Why are ye so fearful? O, ye of little faith! Then he arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm. But the men marveled, saying, What manner of man is this, then even winds and the sea obey him? And when he was come to the other side, into the country of Gergesenes, there met him two possessed with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And behold they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? Art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding: So the devils besought him saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.” —*Matt. viii:23–31*.

Be Watchful

“Watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of the evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry; for I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me. Lo, Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica, Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry. And Lychicus have I sent to Ephesus. The cloak that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee; and the books. But especially the parchment. Alexander the coppersmith, did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: of whom be thou aware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.” —*2 Tim. iv:5–14*.

Marriage Ceremony

“My Friends:—Forasmuch as marriage was instituted by God Himself, and is honorable in all, it becomes those who would enter into this holy estate duly to consider the sacred obligations imposed thereby. You cannot therefore expect always to enjoy prosperity. Days of adversity will also come. But if you fear God, and keep His commandments, to do them, He will not forsake you. If, with full and free consent you desire to enter this holy relation, you will acknowledge the same by joining your right hands.”

The minister then shall say:

“[Name] and [Name], will you have each other, as husband and wife, to live together after God’s ordinance, in the holy state of matrimony, to love, honor and cherish each other in health and sickness, in prosperity and in adversity, and forsaking all others to cleave to each other only, so long as you both shall live?”