

CHRISTIANITY - WHERE DID WE GET THIS WORD?

As Christians, we hold to the mantra: “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; and where the Bible is silent, we are silent.” (Thomas Campbell - 1763-1854) While this is not found expressed in exactly these words, the principle is found in the pages of inspiration. (Revelation 22:18-19; Acts 20:27; Galatians 1:8-9; 1 Peter 4:11; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2 John 9; Matthew 15:8-9)

Five months before I was born, Brother R. L. Whiteside wrote an article in the Bible Banner entitled “Purer Speech And Clearer Understanding.” After talking about specific examples of language used that does not have its origin in the Bible, he said: “We are picking too many things out of denominational garbage cans.” This is, to say the least, an apt observation. Seventy-two years later, we have a pile of garbage pulled from denominations that are used as if they came from God.

One term that is used so frequently that you would think it was found on every page of the New Testament is “Christianity.” It is used to describe the system or doctrine we teach and practice. But, what is the origin of the word?

Searching the Scriptures, it is obviously absent. This alone is reason for us to question the use of the word. Remember: “Where the Bible speaks, we speak; and where the Bible is silent, we are silent?” But there is even more evidence that should cause us to hesitate in our use of the word.

“Although the use of the term Christian is attested in the book of Acts from the middle of the 1st century, the earliest recorded use of the term Christianity (Χριστιανισμός) is by Ignatius of Antioch about 107 AD, who is also associated with modification of the sabbath, promotion of the bishop, and critique of the Judaizers.” (Walter Bauer, Greek-English Lexicon, Ignatius of Antioch Letter to the Magnesians 10, Letter to the Romans (Roberts-Donaldson tr., Lightfoot tr., Greek text))

Now we know where the term originated. Not in the pages of inspiration, but the writings of one of the “church fathers.” Before you start trying to justify his use of the word, you need to consider this quote: “Ignatius is also known for introducing a few new terms into the Christian language which facilitated a clearer understanding of some Christian concepts. For instance, the word Christianity (Magnesians X, 1, 3; Romans III, 3) is a word used for the first time by Ignatius in order to show the new

situation in the world which was created by the teaching of Christ. Another term is Catholic Church (Smyrnaeans VIII, 2) – meaning the ecumenical, universal church which spoke of unity of doctrine within the true church as opposed to heretical communities (Feciouru, 1979, 151-152). Moreover, historian Mark A. Noll (2008, 49) believes that the first Christian creed which we have in writing from our Eastern fathers is also a legacy of Ignatius of Antioch. The creed was passed on in writing through the entire ninth chapter of Ignatius' epistle to the Trallians.” (M. A. Noll, Momente Cruciale în istoria Bisericii (Title in English: Turning Points), Logos, ClujNapoca, 2008, 49.)

Here you have it. The same man who originated the term “Christianity” is the source of the term “Catholic Church.” Ignatius also made distinctions between Elders and Bishops, which was the beginning of the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

What can we conclude? Christianity does not have its origin in the pages of inspiration. In its inception, it was used to describe what resulted in Catholicism. Should we be using it to describe the Gospel of Christ? “We are picking too many things out of denominational garbage cans.”