Resolutions on the Limits of the Use of the Authority of External Compulsion

Everything of this age points to the fragility of a noncompulsory, internalized and relational authority: that it has no backing of compulsion and therefore cannot force anyone to submit to it; and, more importantly, that it cannot operate unless people not only submit to it, and even eagerly desire it, honor it and respect it, but also do all in their power to protect the fragile, vulnerable and increasingly rare communities in which it still operates. Marriage, while having a public face, is in essence a private relationship. So also the church, which fulfills what marriage could only typify (Eph. 5:25-32), while having a public face, is defined by private relationships so vulnerable and exposed that they can only exist within the confines of a secure covenant covering. This covering is not made secure by any external power of brute force or compulsion, such as that which protects the State. On the contrary, it stands most threatened by such a power and is rather made secure by the willingness of those involved to indeed do all in *their* power to protect it, honor it, respect it. No one who values the private nature of love can rejoice that families in totalitarian States, such as the former U.S.S.R. or Nazi Germany, should be subject to the intrusion of every stranger, or even every state agent or bureaucrat, who happens by at mealtime, barges in without knocking and sits down at the table to help himself to the food and fellowship without an invitation. Such a person is not a guest but an invader and forager, looter and freebooter. Neither should the church as a private institution be so subject to compulsory entrance—to violation and rape. Some order and propriety, as with the family, ought to govern and protect the church from such invasions, but all such order seems on the verge of total disintegration, except for overlooked pockets here and there.

Since the church is the *Bride* of Christ, we do not view its marriage relationship to God as a public spectacle; nor for us is religion an agent, or the proper province, of the corporate State and its investigative, police and judicial services. As said, the church does have a public face, but what distinguishes it as an institution is its private relationships of love, sacred relationships that, like the marital relationship, can only be profaned if improperly exposed to public invasion and scrutiny. The church, like marriage and family, is to us a private, voluntary institution. Of course, today performance-oriented public churches exist, which seem, in contrast to relationship-oriented private churches (blunt as it may sound), more like prostitutes than brides. For us, televised "evangelistic" extravaganzas and religious "entertainment," as well as luxurious show biz churches, all of which look more like Hollywood studios with their gaudy, made-up stars than sanctuaries of prayer for a simple and holy people, are truly public institutions. They grieve us with their cheap and profane portrayal of God and reveal more an underlying exhibitionism and spiritual pornography than a desire to share any truly good news about the simple carpenter from Nazareth. We have rejected such profane expressions as beyond the boundaries of God's covenant. We instead desire our church to be a holy sanctuary rather than a profane public square. We are not looking for a place to perform to gain an audience's applause. We are looking for the holy confines of covenant where tender hearts can truly open and become one.

In seeking such oneness of heart, God has shown us that only holy, sacred covenant allows the permanence and protection to relationships that over time can produce oneness and harmony out of dissonance and conflict. This integrity in relationships that results from covenant provides a covering for the lives of all those who would take refuge under

he wings of covenant. In marriage, it takes time for two lives, two worlds, to merge. eople must resolve conflicts. They must overcome weaknesses. Covenant provides the ramework over time that holds people together long enough to resolve these differences r problems or shortcomings while love brings them to perfect oneness. Covenants like narriage and family protect and shield from exposure to disinterested parties those veaknesses that people desire to overcome until the time comes at which they have onquered them. It gives the framework for the love that "covers a multitude of sins" 1 Pet. 4:8, Ampl.). All parties must, however, be excluded who have no commitment or vho remain unwilling to make a commitment that would demonstrate that they value the elationship.

The commitment over time made by those within covenant, in the hopes that in due rder all differences can be resolved *within the confines* of the covenant, gives assurance o all involved that each can risk making themselves vulnerable to exposure without fear f being hurt, rejected or desecrated. This commitment shows that we view in ourselves nd each other the image of God, that we have a sacred obligation to that image, and so he relationship becomes to us sacred, a sanctuary to protect. In this way covenant forms sanctuary from fear. For this reason, a child senses stability and covering within the ovenant of family, and for this reason God has ordained the family as the nurturing abitat for child rearing. Within this protective wall the child can work through not only he weaknesses inherent in youthfulness, but he can also work out his character ifficulties as well. He can risk, within the secure confines of the family, his first attempts t walking, talking, reading, working or a multitude of other (to him) monumental tasks vithout the paralyzing fear of rejection because of failure (as is so common in both the cademic programs and the peer group pressure of *public* schools). The only "failure" hat demands rejection is the deliberate breaking of that covenant which holds all else ogether and covers everyone in the secure protection of love.

Public exposure of the workings and problems of the private relationships within ovenant is one such example of breaking covenant. Such exposure breaks through the ragile membrane that defines the contours of a voluntary, freely given expression of love nd care for one another. The force of law or compulsion cannot provide the covering of a ove covenant; indeed, for an individual to resort to compulsion to settle any perceived isputes or problems only confesses that such a person has abandoned all faith in love's ower, that such a person believes no grounds remain for giving the voluntary love ovenant a chance to continue. To resort to compulsion, in effect, means the individual elieves the law should step into the midst of the love covenant and bring about a ivorce. Compulsion cannot serve to protect or build up relationships of love; only oluntary commitment to the internalized authority of love can provide the security for earts to become exposed and made one. True love, as Solomon said, is like a gazelle on he mountainside; its fragility demands you approach it only with the utmost care, atience and respect. Otherwise, it will flee. Like the delicate gazelle, love recognizes its wn vulnerability. It is so fragile that all who desire to partake of such love must abandon ll reliance on the brute might of compulsion and learn instead to walk gently and ircumspectly, trusting wholly upon only that meek internalized authority that has no acking of compulsion.

It is in light of all this that we resolve to make explicit in the relationships of this hurch to its members and the members to this church a dictum of Scripture concerning he use by believers of the power of State compulsion against one another. Given the eightened fragility of all voluntary covenants, such as we have described above and vhich this church embraces; and because we now live in a world so conditioned by the oarseness of brute compulsion that many can no longer even distinguish authority of

external and brutal force from internal, noncompulsory authority of life unbacked by any constraints but love; and given that we are enjoined by scriptures such as Matthew 5:25, 40 and 1 Cor. 6:1-7 not to appropriate for ourselves that external authority by taking fellow believers to court or judging them through such courts and thereby subjecting the private relationships of the covenant to public exposure; and because our refusal to do this is so central to our witness to being expressions strictly of that voluntary and nonresistant love of the Lamb of God; and because Paul says that for Christians to rely upon that type of external authority and thereby exposing weaknesses and problems and shortcomings of the church or its members before unbelievers brings such a reproach as to completely defeat our Christian witness; and given that because of the very nature of the authority of love, we do not feel we can, nor do we desire to, exercise this godly authority into any individual's life who does not openly authorize it or who does not desire to carefully protect the tender community in which alone such voluntary authority can operate; be it therefore resolved that upon any individual's acceptance into premembership, situational or any other membership status in this church or its associates or subsidiary organizations or businesses, that each such associate or member openly, voluntarily, under no coercion, duress or false enticement, agrees, even should that individual subsequently leave the fellowship or enter into some other membership status, to never bring *before the public outside our church* any disagreement the individual may have with the church, any accusations of wrongdoing or any charge or suit or court action against any of its members, its patterns and practices, but to instead follow the scriptural pattern to "*first* go and be reconciled with your brother" (Matt. 5:24) and so to obey Paul's admonition that all disputes be settled *within* the confines of the church covenant in accord with 1 Corinthians 6:1-6. Be it further resolved that each associate or member agrees to always bring his or her questions, disputes, accusations, before his brothers and sisters rather than air them before the public. Be it further stated that, recognizing the vulnerability of the relational authority of the church, that it is only voluntary and has no, nor seeks any, power of compulsion to protect it, each associate and/or member also therefore, under no duress or coercion whatsoever, further resolves to waive any and all rights to sue for money or property or public confession or apology any and/or all members of this church individually or this church corporately, its associates or subsidiary organizations or any 501(d) business under its supervision over any and all disagreements and/or perceived injuries, physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual or any other. Be it further resolved that the church in turn agrees to what it has always followed as a Biblical pattern: that in any defense against such accusations that would require any exposure of the problems involved in the one bringing the accusation, that the exposure of the individual and his problems will only go so far as the accuser himself has spread his complaint. If the accuser will stay within the scriptural limits to resolve his dispute within the boundaries of covenant, the church agrees to never expose his shortcomings and sins to any outside its covenant. Be it further resolved that the church likewise waives all rights to sue any individual for any purposes whatsoever.* By these resolutions may all our relationships rest not upon any authority of brute compulsion but only upon the perceived and voluntarily submitted to will of God.

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* excludes the right to injunction, such as against trespass, against destruction of property, against personal injury and so on because such injunction does not seek damages against the individual but only seeks to restrain him and to protect the church from some form of forcible invasion of its privacy.

I have read and understand the above *Resolutions on the Limits of the Use of the Authority of External Compulsion*. I have carefully considered the fact that I am relinquishing certain secular legal rights listed above and below for the consideration of being accepted into associate or membership status of this church. Any questions or reservations that I may have, I have fully discussed and resolved in my mind and heart. Therefore, I, _____, voluntarily and eagerly agree to the above waiver of my rights to publicize any dispute I may have or ever will have with this church or any of its members and voluntarily and eagerly agree to the above waiver of my right to ever sue this church or any of its members.

_____
(Signature)

The State of Texas
County of _____

Before me, a Notary Public, on this day personally appeared _____, known to me to be the person whose name is subscribed to the foregoing instrument and acknowledged to me that he executed the same for the purposes and consideration therein expressed.

Given under my hand and seal of office this _____ day of _____, A.D. 19 _____.

_____
Notary Public, State of Texas

I, _____, acting as the duly appointed agent of Emmaus Christian Fellowship, understand that the church is relinquishing certain legal rights as stated in the above resolutions for consideration of accepting associates and members into this church and affirm that the church agrees to all the terms of the above waiver.

_____
(Signature)

The State of Texas
County of _____

Before me, the undersigned, a Notary Public, on this day personally appeared _____ _____, known to me to be the person and officer whose name is subscribed to the foregoing instrument and acknowledged to me that the same was the act of the said Emmaus Christian Fellowship, a corporation, and that he executed the same as the act of such corporation for the purposes and consideration therein expressed, and in the capacity therein stated.

Given under my hand and seal of office this _____ day of _____, A.D. 19 _____.

_____
Notary Public, State of Texas