

THE
BAGDAD
DECLARATION

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JOSEPH JACOWITZ

NOT FOR RESALE

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INTRODUCTION

The Line in the Sand

The modern church is facing a profound spiritual crisis: the systemic return of simony. We are not merely witnessing the historical buying and selling of ecclesiastical offices, but the tragic commodification of the gospel itself. In far too many places, the pulpit—which was ordained to be a humble signpost pointing every eye to the Savior—has been transformed into a monument to the speaker. The desire for human approval, financial security, and personal brand-building has steadily usurped Jesus Christ’s absolute headship.

The book, *The Ministry Belongs to Christ*, laid the exegetical foundation, proving from Scripture that Christ retains absolute, non-negotiable authority over His church. This companion manifesto—*The Bagdad Declaration*—serves as the tactical charter and the urgent call to arms.

We must draw a definitive line in the sand. When the fear of man gags our mouths and silences our witness, we dare not treat it as a light thing. We cannot purchase the fleeting

approval of men by denying the Savior who bore our public shame upon the tree. True heralds of Christ must share the spirit of John the Baptist: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” To proclaim the humility of Jesus with integrity, our ambition must be swallowed up in His glory, finding contentment in being entirely forgotten so long as Christ is remembered, loved, and obeyed.

The pages that follow outline the eight uncompromised articles of our fellowship. They serve as a filtering mechanism, a standard of global accountability, and a mandate for reproducible discipleship. They are not merely suggestions for better church management; they are a call to unconditional surrender.

PART I

**The Crisis of the
Commoditized Gospel**

CHAPTER 1

Modern Simony

Historically, simony was a blatant, transactional corruption—the buying and selling of ecclesiastical offices, pardons, and sacred duties by men who sought worldly power rather than spiritual service. The modern church easily condemns the medieval sale of bishoprics, yet it remains tragically blind to a far more insidious iteration of the exact same disease. We are witnessing the systemic return of simony through the commodification of the gospel itself.

In the contemporary landscape, the ministry is frequently treated as a human enterprise to be managed and marketed. At its core, this corruption is driven by nefarious motives: the insatiable appetite for human approval, the pursuit of financial security, and the idolatry of personal influence. Men who were called to be shepherds have become salesmen, treating godliness as a mere means of personal and financial gain (1 Timothy 6:5). They calculate the cost of the truth, softening the radical demands of the cross because they love

the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12:43). The message is adjusted to ensure the tithes continue and the audience expands, quietly trading the absolute authority of Christ for a comfortable, profitable narrative.

This transactional gospel directly rebels against the biblical motives for disseminating the Word of God. The true herald does not peddle the Word of God for profit; rather, he speaks in Christ with absolute sincerity, as a man commissioned by God (2 Corinthians 2:17). The biblical mandate is clear: ministers are to shepherd the flock willingly and eagerly, entirely rejecting any desire for shameful, dishonest gain or the urge to lord over the congregation (1 Peter 5:2-3). True ministers do not use flattering words to manipulate the sheep, nor do they use their authority as a cloak for covetousness or a platform to seek glory from men (1 Thessalonians 2:4-6). Their sole, consuming motive is to seek the glory of the One who sent them (John 7:18).

The most grievous manifestation of modern simony is the leveraging of the pulpit for personal brand-building. The pulpit was ordained by God to be a humble, trembling signpost pointing every desperate eye to the Savior. Instead, it has been hijacked and rebuilt as a monument to the speaker. When a pastor steps before his flock harboring a secret craving for esteem or applause, he effectively dresses his own self-exaltation in the language of Calvary. By trying to make himself important, he casts a shadow over the very light he was commissioned to bear.

True heralds must recognize that the cross shatters all human pride. Our condition was so utterly desperate that nothing less than the shed blood of the Son of God could rescue us. Using that staggering message to build a personal empire or win men's admiration is a profound betrayal. We

must definitively reject this transactional religion. The ministry belongs entirely to Christ, and it cannot be bought, sold, or leveraged for human glory.

CHAPTER 2

The Fear of Man and the Consumer-Driven Pulpit

The fear of man is the oxygen that allows modern simony to breathe. If we are to understand why men merchandise the gospel today, we must look at what terrifies them: the loss of the crowd, the loss of influence, and the loss of the currency that the crowd brings. When a minister begins to view his congregation as a consumer base and his ministry as a brand, he inevitably becomes paralyzed by the fear of offending his market.

In the medieval church, simony was the overt, calculated purchase of a bishopric. Today, it is the silent, cowardly agreement to soften the radical demands of the cross in order to keep the tithes flowing, the seats filled, and the church board pacified. The fear of losing prominent donors, cultural relevance, or social standing transforms the appointed herald of God into a hired manager of public relations. He trades

Christ's absolute authority for the financial and reputational security offered by men.

The ultimate tragedy of this consumer-driven pulpit is the devastation it wreaks upon the vulnerable. When the fear of man and the love of currency replace the fear of God, those appointed to protect the sheep inevitably become predators. Instead of fulfilling the sacred, Christ-given mandate to feed the sheep, these unfaithful shepherds are actively fleecing the flock. They see a hurting, unguarded congregation not as souls to be carefully nourished with the unvarnished truth, but as a resource to exploit for personal empire-building.

The prophet Ezekiel thundered against this exact spiritual extortion: "Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Shouldn't the shepherds feed the flocks? You eat the fat and clothe yourselves with the wool; you slaughter the fatlings, but you do not feed the flock" (Ezekiel 34:2-3). They take advantage of the flock's desperate and vulnerable state, manipulating their trust to fund their own ambitions and secure their own comforts. They are feeding themselves instead of feeding the sheep. The Lord Himself pronounced a severe, terrifying judgment on such betrayal: "Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!" (Jeremiah 23:1). A true pastor lays down his life for the sheep, but a hireling merely calculates the profit margin, leaving the flock wounded, starving, and exposed.

This is the specific corruption the Bagdad Declaration is designed to confront. We cannot decouple the fear of man from the commodification of the church. When a pastor alters the message to protect his platform, he engages in a transactional gospel—selling out the truth for temporal comfort and institutional survival. He has determined that the approval of men is more valuable than the unfiltered

Word of God, placing human authority above the headship of Christ.

As established in Article II of our charter, biblical courage requires confessing Christ openly and faithfully, even when it costs men's approval, comfort, or financial backing. If a minister's obedience is conditional on whether the message is profitable or popular, he has already sold his office. The true herald does not peddle the Word of God for profit (2 Corinthians 2:17). He must be entirely willing to lose the building, the broadcast, and the budget rather than compromise the Savior who bought him. We must bring our fear of the crowd to the foot of the cross and recognize a sobering truth: a ministry purchased with compromise is a ministry Christ does not own.

CHAPTER 3

The Danger of “Not Yet”

The crisis of the commoditized gospel is not sustained by men who outright reject the authority of Christ; it is sustained by men who endlessly postpone it. The most subtle and devastating form of rebellion in the modern church is not the blatant denial of Scripture, but the conditional obedience of “not yet.” It is the minister who recognizes the deep compromise in his methods, feels the conviction of the Holy Spirit, but tells God, “I will surrender this platform, but not until I have secured my future.”

This delayed obedience is, in truth, deliberate disobedience. When a pastor defends his reliance on human approval or justifies the transactional nature of his ministry, he begins to view his pragmatic excuses as divine permission. He reasons that the church’s financial pressures or his board’s expectations justify a temporary suspension of biblical fidelity. But honest questions deserve answers, whereas cherished sins require immediate repentance. You cannot ask the Lord to bless the very disobedience He is calling you to abandon.

Jesus laid bare this hypocrisy when He asked, “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46).

When leaders procrastinate in answering the radical call to purge the church of simony, they do not buy time—they merely store up wrath. Repeated refusal to surrender our platforms hardens the pastoral heart and deeply grieves the Holy Spirit. Christ is the supreme Head of His Church; He will not share His glory with our egos, nor will He co-author a ministry with our pride. To answer His call for absolute purity with a comfortable “not yet” is an insult that accelerates His righteous discipline against the commodification of His bride.

The Scriptures offer a terrifying warning to the man who ignores conviction to protect his influence: “He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck, will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Proverbs 29:1). The Lord will not tolerate a marketplace masquerading as a sanctuary, and delaying radical repentance only hastens His divine correction. As the Apostle Peter warned, “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17). We cannot respond to the King of Glory with a conditional timetable.

To say “not yet” to the Lord of Glory is the height of theological arrogance, for it presumes upon a grace that has not been promised for tomorrow. When a minister negotiates with the Holy Spirit’s conviction—asking for time to secure his earthly platform before submitting to Christ’s absolute headship—he turns God’s patience into a license for sin. The Apostle Paul severely warns against this fatal presumption: “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God

leads you to repentance?” (Romans 2:4). To delay obedience is to declare that our timing is superior to God’s sovereign command, foolishly boasting about a tomorrow we do not own (James 4:14). The Lord does not negotiate terms of surrender with His under-shepherds. When the King issues a command to cleanse His temple of merchandisers, any response other than immediate, trembling obedience is an act of open rebellion.

Perhaps you are reading these words and feeling the sudden, crushing weight of conviction. You may find yourself in an agonizing, fearful disposition, realizing for the first time that the methods you were taught to celebrate as “church growth” are, in fact, the modern machinery of simony. For decades, a transactional gospel has saturated our sanctuaries so thoroughly that many faithful men have simply surrendered to the current, entirely blind to the theological poison they were ingesting. Confronting the reality that you have unknowingly perpetuated a systemic corruption—one baptized as permissible for generations yet violently opposed to Scripture—forces a crushing reckoning with the spiritual devastation inflicted upon the flock.

But hear this urgent appeal: do not let the awkwardness of this awakening paralyze you. It is terrifying to look at the ministry you have carefully managed and realize that part or all of the foundation must be torn out. You may deeply fear your board’s reaction, the exodus of members from your congregation, or the collapse of your professional reputation. But you must not shrink back! The Lord of Glory has opened your eyes not to destroy you, but to rescue His bride and restore the purity of your calling. The hour is late, and the crisis is too severe for hesitation or pride. Do not let the fear of what you must dismantle keep you from purifying

the Savior's church. Embrace the high cost of obedience and boldly tear down the idols of the marketplace in your sanctuary today. Christ alone is worth the cost.

PART II

The Doctrinal Anchor

CHAPTER 4

The Supremacy of Christ's Call

If we are to dismantle the modern machinery of simony and restore the pulpit to its rightful dignity, we must drop our anchor into the absolute, non-negotiable headship of Jesus Christ. The Scriptures declare unequivocally that “He is the head of the body, the church... that in all things He may have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18). The church is not a franchise, the congregation is not a consumer base, and the ministry is not a human enterprise to be managed, marketed, or merchandised. The ministry belongs entirely to Christ, for it is His flock, “which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). He is the supreme Architect, the sole Proprietor, and the reigning King of His church. We possess no authority to alter His message, negotiate His terms, or leverage His bride for our own ambitions. We are merely “stewards of the mysteries of God,” and the biblical standard leaves no room for theological creativity: “it is required in stewards that one be found faithful” to the Master’s exact decrees (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).

To understand the posture required of a true herald, we must look to the ultimate example of the Chief Shepherd Himself (1 Peter 5:4). In the Gospel of John, during the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus stood in the temple and delivered a profound defense of His ministry and authority. The religious elites marveled at His teaching, questioning how He possessed such theological depth without formal rabbinic training. Jesus answered them, saying, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority” (John 7:16-17).

Even the incarnate Son of God, in His earthly ministry, refused to act as a rogue agent building a personal platform. He submitted Himself entirely to the Father’s mandate, declaring, “I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things” (John 8:28). He did not construct a brand; He delivered a message. He did not speak on His own authority; He perfectly echoed the decrees of heaven.

Jesus then delivered the devastating diagnostic that separates the true minister from the religious merchandiser: “He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him” (John 7:18).

This single verse exposes the corrupt heart of modern simony. When a man steps into the pulpit and speaks “from himself”—relying on his own charisma, softening the truth to maintain his audience, or manipulating the sheep to secure his financial future—he is seeking his own glory. He has usurped the supremacy of Christ’s call and replaced it with a craving for human applause. He has transformed the sacred desk into a mirror, reflecting his own image rather than the majesty of the Savior. But the apostolic mandate violently

opposes such vanity: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5).

In stark contrast, the man who seeks the glory of the One who sent him is freed from the crushing weight of public opinion. He knows the immutable rule of the pulpit: "For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). Because he has unconditionally surrendered the ministry to Christ, he is no longer enslaved by the fear of losing it. He understands that his sole responsibility is absolute fidelity to the King's message. He does not calculate the cost of obedience because he has already counted all things as loss for the excellence of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord (Philippians 3:8).

The Bagdad Declaration begins here: Unconditional Surrender and Christ's Authority. We must violently reject the temptation to speak from ourselves. We must return to the fearful, trembling realization that we are merely bondservants carrying the edicts of the Sovereign. Even after our most exhausting labors, our posture must mirror the humility Christ demanded: "We are unprofitable servants. We have done what our duty to do was" (Luke 17:10). If the ministry truly belongs to Christ, then our only ambition must be to seek the glory of the One who sent us—even if it means we are entirely forgotten.

CHAPTER 5

The Bondservant's Posture

To dismantle the idol of the consumer-driven pulpit, we must recover the minister's biblical identity. The New Testament does not describe God's herald as an entrepreneur, a visionary, or a platform-builder. The apostles overwhelmingly identified themselves with a single, devastating title: *doulos*—the bondservant (Romans 1:1; James 1:1). A bondservant owns no property, dictates no terms, and builds no empire of his own. His time, his labor, and his very life belong entirely to his Master, knowing that whatever he does, it is the Lord Christ whom he serves (Colossians 3:23-24). When a minister fully grasps that he is the blood-bought property of Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 6:19-20), the frantic pursuit of personal brand-building is shattered. He remembers the apostolic warning not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly (Romans 12:3). A true bondservant does not negotiate for better conditions or demand public recognition; he is

consumed by one solitary ambition: the absolute magnification of his Lord.

If we seek the ultimate model for this posture, we must look to Christ Himself, who “made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant” (Philippians 2:7). The Savior established an ironclad rule for His under-shepherds: “Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all” (Mark 10:43-44). Any pastoral ambition that contradicts this mandate is fundamentally antichrist. As my mentor and friend, Pastor L.R. Shelton, Jr., used to say to me, “Brother Joseph, the way up is down.”

The true minister is commanded to intentionally seek this lowest place, embracing a life of joyful obscurity so that the majesty of Christ might remain unobstructed. Yet, the modern church has invented the grotesque, unbiblical role of the “celebrity pastor”—an office that fundamentally contradicts the blood-stained wood of the cross. This counterfeit role thrives on the exact evil modeled by Diotrophes, “who loves to have the preeminence among them” (3 John 1:9). Diotrophes’ arrogance and selfish ambition fractured the early church, and that same wicked pursuit of supremacy now fuels the engine of modern simony. Simony specifically appeals to the unchecked pride of these religious celebrities, transforming the sacred desk into a lucrative enterprise that rewards avarice rather than generosity. Instead of pouring themselves out like a drink offering for the flock’s spiritual nourishment, these men view the congregation as a market to be tapped. They monetize their influence to hoard wealth and adulation, exchanging the self-sacrificing generosity of a true shepherd for the hollow, grasping greed of a marketplace merchant. To such men, the Lord issues the same piercing

rebuke He gave to Baruch: “And do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them” (Jeremiah 45:5). The pulpit is not a stage for self-promotion, for Jesus plainly warned, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Matthew 23:12).

The greatest human model for this surrender is John the Baptist. When John’s disciples grew fiercely jealous over the expanding ministry of Jesus—warning their master that “all are coming to Him”—John did not panic or strategize to retain his audience. Instead, he rejoiced. He identified himself merely as the “friend of the bridegroom,” declaring that his joy was entirely fulfilled simply by hearing the Bridegroom’s voice (John 3:26-29). Then, he uttered the most profound metric for pastoral success ever recorded: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). He understood the spiritual reality that “unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain” (John 12:24).

This must become the heartbeat of our global fellowship. True heralds of Christ must violently reject the spotlight, adopting the psalmist’s desperate plea: “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory” (Psalm 115:1). To proclaim the humility of Jesus with integrity, our ambition must be swallowed up in His glory, finding utter contentment in being entirely forgotten so long as Christ is remembered, loved, and obeyed. We are merely fragile earthen vessels; He is the transcendent treasure (2 Corinthians 4:7). If a man preaches effectively, he must immediately ask himself, “For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). The modern tragedy is that far too many pastors are furiously attempting

to increase alongside Christ, demanding that the Lord share His glory with their carefully curated ministries.

The Apostle Paul fiercely dismantled this arrogance in the Corinthian church, rebuking their tendency to form factions around charismatic leaders. “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?” (1 Corinthians 3:5). Paul aggressively reduced his own significance, reminding the church that neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, “but God who gives the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7). He did not merely preach this lowliness to others; he deeply internalized it. As his ministry expanded and his revelation deepened, his self-estimation kept plummeting. He genuinely viewed himself as “less than the least of all the saints” (Ephesians 3:8), and when reflecting on the staggering grace that redeemed him, he openly confessed that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, “of whom I am chief” (1 Timothy 1:15). This was not false modesty or calculated rhetorical flourish; it was the agonizing, beautiful reality of a man who stood so close to the blinding glory of Christ that his own ego was entirely incinerated. The minister is nothing; the Master is everything. Therefore, if anyone ministers, he must do it “with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 4:11).

If we are to survive the creeping disease of simony, we must deliberately plunge our egos into the cross of Christ until we can honestly declare, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians 2:20). We must echo the final apostolic cry: “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the

world” (Galatians 6:14). The bondservant does not seek the applause of the crowd because he has already died to it. His platform is an altar, and his ministry is a living sacrifice.

CHAPTER 6

Radical Repentance & The Cross

To eradicate the cancer of simony from our pulpits, we cannot rely on superficial course corrections or institutional rebranding. A systemic corruption requires a violent, surgical extraction. The biblical mandate for the compromised minister is not a strategic adjustment, but radical, weeping repentance. The Apostle Paul makes a definitive distinction between the world's shallow apologies and the deep, shattering conviction of the Holy Spirit: "For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). We must not merely apologize for our pragmatic excesses while keeping the machinery of self-promotion intact; we must drag the idol of our ambition into the light and entirely demolish it.

Radical repentance begins when we accurately comprehend the cross of Jesus Christ. The modern, consumer-driven

church has tragically reduced the cross to a marketing logo—a polished aesthetic designed to attract a crowd. But the cross is not a brand; it is a bloody instrument of execution. Christ did not endure the wrath of God so that men could build lucrative platforms upon His suffering. He established the immutable terms of discipleship: “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matthew 16:24). The celebrity pastor demands the crown of influence without the crucifixion of the ego, entirely ignoring the apostolic reality that “those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24). We cannot preach a crucified Savior from an exalted, self-seeking posture.

When Jesus entered the temple in Jerusalem, He did not organize a committee to gently transition the merchants out of the sanctuary. He made a whip of cords, overturned the tables, and drove them out, commanding, “Take these things away! Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise!” (John 2:15-16). He violently expelled those who were leveraging the worship of God for personal profit, rebuking them for turning a house of prayer into a “den of thieves” (Matthew 21:13). The Lord of Glory is demanding that same rigorous purging today. When a minister steals the glory of God to enrich himself or elevate his own name, he commits spiritual theft in the sanctuary. The risen Christ issues a severe and urgent warning to the compromised church: “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent” (Revelation 2:5).

Yet, within this terrifying demand for purity lies the breathtaking grace of the Gospel. Christ does not call us to

repentance to destroy us, but to resurrect our true calling. When a minister finally collapses under the weight of his compromise, abandons his defensive pride, and weeps over the merchandising of his office, he meets a Savior of boundless mercy. “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise” (Psalm 51:17). The Lord is close to those who have a broken heart, and He saves such as have a contrite spirit (Psalm 34:18).

The Bagdad Declaration is a call to return to the blood-stained wood of Calvary. We must lay down our platforms, renounce our hidden avarice, and confess our desperate need for the cleansing blood of Jesus. There can be no authentic ministry without a daily, agonizing death to self. Radical repentance is the only path back to a pulpit that is owned, commanded, and empowered exclusively by the King of Kings.

P R E A M B L E

Recognizing that the ministry of the Word and the dissemination of theological literature belong uniquely to the Lord Jesus Christ, and observing with grave concern the increasing commercialization, corporate enclosure, and financial gatekeeping of spiritual resources within the visible Church, we affirm our solemn duty to return to the biblical standard of gratuitous stewardship. Therefore, we set forth these articles to govern the faithful, unhindered distribution of ministerial and theological works for the edification of the body of Christ.

The Articles of Fellowship

ARTICLE I

The Absolute Headship of Jesus Christ and Gratuitous Stewardship

To establish a fellowship entirely free from the taint of simony, we must begin where the universe begins: with the total, unyielding supremacy of Jesus Christ. Article I is not merely a doctrinal statement to be signed and filed away; it is a present, reigning reality to be fiercely defended. We declare without hesitation that Jesus Christ is the sole Architect, Builder, and Sovereign Head of His Church (Ephesians 1:22-23), having been appointed far above all principality and power, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. The church is not a pastoral democracy, nor is it a corporate franchise awaiting our pragmatic innovations. It is an absolute monarchy, established by the eternal decree of the Father: “Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion” (Psalm 2:6).

He rules not by human suffrage, but by the irresistible sceptre of His grace, for the government will be upon His shoulder, and of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end (Isaiah 9:6-7).

The modern ecclesiastical merchant operates under the arrogant assumption that Christ has outsourced the management of His bride to marketing firms, demographic studies, and pastoral branding consultants. But the Savior declared, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18). He did not stutter, and He did not delegate His headship. When a minister alters the liturgy, softens the preaching, or manipulates worship to satisfy the consumer demands of a target audience, he commits high treason. He is dethroning the King of Glory to appease the fleeting appetites of men. In his desperate pursuit of relevance, he severs the church from its life source, failing to hold fast to the Head, from whom the entire body is nourished and knit together (Colossians 2:19). Such men forget the solemn warning of the Apostle, who asked, For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ (Galatians 1:10). The true herald refuses to corrupt the divine message, knowing that we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God, but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:17).

If Christ is truly the Head, then His Word is entirely sufficient for the governance of His church. We must boldly reaffirm the apostolic truth that His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). We need no sociological surveys to tell us how to gather, and we need no cultural focus groups to tell us what to preach. The true herald looks only to the decrees of the Chief Shepherd,

knowing that no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 3:11), according to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder (1 Corinthians 3:10). We hold fast to the pattern of sound words, remembering that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Therefore, the first mandate of this declaration is unconditional submission. Every bondservant who aligns with this charter must formally renounce the arm of the flesh. We will not build empires in our own names, nor will we construct monuments to our own cleverness. We will take our posture in the dust and tremble at His Word (Isaiah 66:2), trusting that the same Christ who shed His blood to purchase the church possesses the exact power required to sustain it. Any ministry built on a foundation other than the sovereign dictates of Jesus Christ is a ministry destined for the ash heap, for unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it (Psalm 127:1).

ARTICLE II

No Commercial Walls Around the Truth

To protect the purity of Christ's kingdom, we must get rid of religious merchandise. Article II isn't a legal rule; it's a moral line drawn against turning the Gospel into a business. God's truth is not a commodity to be bought, sold, or franchised for money, for we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God, but as of sincerity, we speak in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:17). Trying to make money off divine truth is an ancient evil. When Simon the sorcerer tried to buy the gift of God with money, Peter sharply rebuked him: "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money!" (Acts 8:20). Despite this warning, modern publishers have put up tollbooths on the narrow road, hiding Christian books, sermons, and helps behind expensive paywalls and subscription models. In doing so, they have turned the dissemination of God's Word into a marketplace, standing condemned by

Jesus, who made a whip and cleared the temple, saying, “Do not make My Father’s house a house of merchandise” (John 2:14-16), fulfilling the scripture: “Zeal for Your house has eaten me up” (Psalm 69:9).

When an institution claims exclusive commercial ownership over the Bible’s message and ministry labors, they are assaulting the freedom of grace. The spiritual riches of Christ belong to His people, not to corporate balance sheets or entrepreneurs profiting from spiritual hunger. Paul fiercely guarded this freedom, working with his own hands so he could offer the Gospel without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:18). He asked, “Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?” (2 Corinthians 11:7). He also reminded the saints: “Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities... It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:34-35). We reject the idea that spiritual truth needs corporate control to survive. While the laborer is worthy of their local support (Luke 10:7), the Bible warns us against those who think godliness is a means of gain (1 Timothy 6:5).

If the Gospel is a free gift of mercy, we must break down the commercial walls that keep poor believers from the feast of God’s Word, heeding the invitation: “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat... without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1). The prophets and apostles warned against exploiting the needy for profit, with James’s writing, “Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!” (James 5:1). Everyone signing this declaration gives up the right to make money off the sacred. We will no longer participate in turning Christian literature into

a profit-driven business, remembering that the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Timothy 6:10). We trust the Chief Shepherd to provide, knowing you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold... but with the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19), and that we must “freely receive, freely give” (Matthew 10:8).

ARTICLE III

Keeping Content Pure Through Spiritual Care

Giving things away for free doesn't mean we stop caring about truth. Article III establishes that while making money and putting legal walls around books is strictly forbidden, we must still protect the purity of doctrine and the truth of our texts against error and false teaching through spiritual accountability rather than legal control. The truth given to the saints is a sacred trust, telling us to "hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me" (2 Timothy 1:13). Sometimes people think free distribution means anything goes, flooding the church with uncorrected, heretical texts. But Paul charged Timothy to guard that good deposit "by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us" (2 Timothy 1:14), and warned that fierce wolves would rise up from within the flock (Acts 20:29-30).

When a theological work has no oversight, it can easily be twisted by false teachers to their own destruction (2 Peter

3:16). Free distribution must never mean abandoning sound doctrine. John gave a strict warning about compromising truth: “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house” (2 John 1:10-11). Because of this, authors, elders, and faithful oversight bodies have a moral duty to stand against the corruption of theological texts, relying entirely on the Holy Spirit and Scripture—not copyright laws—to ensure what is shared remains completely faithful to God’s Word, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

Every document we share must show a deep commitment to biblical truth. We reject the lawless idea that anyone has the right to alter or corrupt a minister’s work to spread error. We are warned by Scripture: “If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues... and if anyone takes away from the words... God shall take away his part from the Book of Life” (Revelation 22:18-19). We commit ourselves to a ministry that is both completely free to access and completely uncompromising in its defense of the truth, ensuring the bread of life given to God’s sheep is pure and untainted by false teaching.

ARTICLE IV

Covering Costs Without Compulsion

Just because we give Christian materials away for free doesn't mean printing, binding, and shipping them don't cost real money. Article IV addresses how we handle these physical expenses without turning ministry into a business. We recognize that ink, paper, postage, and freight require actual funds. However, paying for these material costs must always happen through voluntary contributions, free-will offerings, and cost-recovery donations, never through mandatory pricing or commercial sales. This follows the biblical pattern where believers cheerfully gave to support the work of the Lord without being squeezed by a commercial invoice, as Paul reminded the Corinthians: "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

When we distribute books, booklets, or Bibles, we must never treat the physical cost as a price tag that locks people

out. The early church funded its needs through the joyful, voluntary generosity of the saints rather than gating spiritual resources behind financial hurdles. Paul commended the Macedonian churches because, “even in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality” (2 Corinthians 8:2). When publishing materials, we may openly share the actual production costs so that God’s people have the privilege of chipping in voluntarily, but no brother or sister should ever be turned away because they cannot pay. As Scripture instructs, “Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches” (Galatians 6:6), but this sharing must always flow from a willing heart, not a forced transaction.

Therefore, every ministry operating under this declaration relies entirely upon the freewill support of God’s people to cover material expenses. We refuse to use commercial invoices, mandatory subscription fees, or profit margins to fund our printing presses. Instead, we cast our needs upon the Lord and invite His people to give as they are moved by the Spirit, remembering the words of the Apostle Paul regarding his own labor: “Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me. I have shown you everything, by laboring like this, that you must support the weak. And remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:34-35). We trust that the God who provides seed to the sower will supply every physical need for the free distribution of His Word, “being enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God” (2 Corinthians 9:11).

ARTICLE V

The Purity of Content and Doctrine

To ensure that gratuitous distribution never becomes a conduit for error, Article V establishes that all literature, teachings, and media shared under this fellowship must remain strictly and unyieldingly bound to historical biblical orthodoxy. Giving materials away without a price tag does not grant license to dilute the truth, compromise with modern ideological trends, or accommodate worldly philosophies. The Apostle Paul charged Timothy to “hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:13), warning that the time would come when men would not endure sound doctrine, but heap up for themselves teachers according to their own desires (2 Timothy 4:3).

Every document and resource endorsed by this fellowship must be rigorously anchored in the uncompromised Word of God, free from state influence, corporate sponsorship, or

pragmatic watering-down. We reject the notion that theological literature can be modernized or adjusted to suit the shifting preferences of a secular culture. Truth is an absolute deposit committed to the saints once for all (Jude 1:3), and those who labor in the dissemination of Christian works bear a solemn, fearful duty to handle the Word of truth accurately, without distortion or deception (2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Corinthians 4:2). Therefore, we commit ourselves to maintaining absolute doctrinal purity in every page we print and every resource we release, ensuring that the bread given to the flock is untainted and lifegiving.

ARTICLE VI

Servant Leadership, Local Church Sufficiency, and the Rejection of Corporate Empires

The church of Jesus Christ is an assembly of sheep led by a Chief Shepherd, not a conglomerate of consumers managed by executive directors. Article VI establishes that the local church—as designed, gathered, and governed by the New Testament pattern—is entirely sufficient under Christ for the worship of God, the edification of the saints, and the proclamation of the Gospel to the ends of the earth. We declare without hesitation that the biblical shepherd is called to lowliness, sacrifice, and spiritual care, explicitly forbidden to lord his authority over the flock or use the sacred calling for personal gain: “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being

lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

In tragic defiance of this mandate, modern evangelicalism has largely abandoned the local church in favor of unaccountable parachurch empires, celebrity speaker circuits, and multi-million-dollar publishing conglomerates. These bureaucratic machines usurp the authority and role of the local congregation, creating an artificial divide between the ordinary communion of the saints and an elite caste of professional religious entrepreneurs. When ministry becomes centralized within corporate institutions that answer only to their own boards and balance sheets, servant leadership is systematically replaced by executive ambition. Our Lord Jesus directly condemned this worldly model of power, warning His disciples: “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called ‘benefactors.’ But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves” (Luke 22:25-26).

The local assembly of believers—equipped with faithful elders and deacons—possesses everything necessary for life, doctrine, and ministry through the indwelling Spirit and the sufficient Word (Titus 1:5; Ephesians 4:11-12). It is the local church that is ordained by God to be “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15), not an independent publishing corporation, media network, or commercial conference business. The early disciples did not rely on detached corporate syndicates to distribute sound literature, train laborers, or plant churches; they depended on the organic, praying, sacrificial life of local congregations walking in mutual fellowship: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’

doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

Therefore, every signatory of this declaration repudiates the corporate empire model of Christian ministry. We reject the prideful notion that massive, centralized institutions are needed to accomplish what Christ entrusted to His humble bride. We resolve that literature distribution, ministerial training, and the care of the saints must flow through or directly serve the life of local churches, supported not by commercial profit margins, but by the glad and sacrificial offerings of the saints: “For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Hebrews 6:10). We commit ourselves to the quiet, faithful work of shepherd-servants who seek no names for themselves, resting in the promise that “when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:4).

ARTICLE VII

Spiritual Accountability, Mutual Fellowship, and the Rejection of Legal Coercion

When we throw out copyright laws, commercial contracts, and legal threats as ways to protect our books and teachings, some people worry that everything will descend into chaos. Article VII addresses this directly by establishing that the purity of our doctrine and the safety of our fellowship are guarded not by human courts or legal papers, but by the Holy Spirit working through mutual accountability, local church oversight, and genuine Christian love. The Apostle Paul reminded the early believers that our spiritual battles are not fought with earthly weapons: “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:4). When errors or divisions arise, the New Testament does not point us to copyright infringement lawsuits or secular judges; instead,

it points us to humble, face-to-face correction among brothers who share the life of Christ.

Modern religious publishing relies heavily on the threat of the court system to control its products, protecting its bottom line with legal force. But true Christian accountability is entirely spiritual. When someone wanders from the truth or attempts to twist sound teaching, the remedy is gentle, spiritual restoration rooted in local church fellowship, as Paul instructed: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). If a teacher or author departs into serious error, faithful churches and believers protect the body of Christ simply by exercising their spiritual discernment— withdrawing fellowship, refusing to distribute compromised materials, and standing firm on the truth without ever filing a lawsuit or invoking a proprietary right.

We must remember that the church is a living spiritual family, not a business corporation wrapped in legal protections. The Apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthian believers for running to secular courts against one another, asking with astonishment: “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?” (1 Corinthians 6:1). How much more tragic is it when Christian ministries use the secular courts of this world to protect their literature empires and enforce their theological boundaries? We reject this carnal reliance on legal coercion. Instead, we commit to walking together in the light, holding one another accountable through prayer, open Bibles, and mutual submission, trusting that the Holy Spirit is fully able to preserve His truth among a humble people who walk in love and holiness.

Explanatory Note on Article VII: The Philosophy of Spiritual Non-Enforcement

This article directly anchors and operationalizes our earlier agreement on spiritual non-enforcement by systematically replacing every carnal, legal mechanism of control with relational, ecclesiastical, and spiritual alternatives. When examining how this text reinforces our prior commitments, three distinct principles stand out:

- **The Explicit Prohibition of Legal Coercion:** Article VII explicitly forbids running to secular courts or utilizing copyright injunctions and cease-and-desist orders to police theological texts. This directly fulfills our consensus that the church must never use worldly, litigious power to enforce its boundaries, echoing Paul's rebuke of the Corinthians taking one another to secular courts (1 Corinthians 6:1).
- **The Substitution of Spiritual Remedies for Legal Leverage:** Where a commercial publisher relies on contracts and courts to correct or penalize a perceived infraction, Article VII establishes that the only valid response to doctrinal drift or textual corruption is spiritual restoration—relying on gentleness, prayer, and face-to-face accountability among brethren (Galatians 6:1).
- **The Exercise of Voluntary Discernment Over Institutional Force:** Rather than locking down literature with legal threats, Article VII entrusts the protection of the flock to the spiritual discernment of local churches. If error appears, the remedy is the voluntary withdrawal of fellowship and the unhindered exposure of truth by the light of Scripture—leaving

the defense of the work entirely in the hands of the Holy Spirit rather than human legal teams.

In short, this article ensures that our rejection of defensive copyright is not a naive vacuum, but a robust return to New Testament methods: weaponizing spiritual truth, mutual accountability, and local church oversight instead of the carnal weapons of this world.

ARTICLE VIII

The Hope of Christ's Return

To keep our labors free from earthly ambition and temporal anxiety, Article VIII anchors our entire manifesto in the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The temptation for any movement is to seek institutional legacy, permanent endowments, or worldly influence that outlasts its founders. But we reject the building of earthly empires, knowing that “here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Hebrews 13:14). Our hope is not anchored in the survival of a publishing house, the security of a corporate balance sheet, or the applause of men, but in the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13).

We commit ourselves to the unfiltered, unmerchandised proclamation of the Gospel, looking solely to His eternal approval and the reward that fades not away (1 Peter 5:4). When the Chief Shepherd is revealed, every human structure of self-exaltation will be burned up, but those who labored in lowliness and faith for His glory alone will hear

Him say, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21). Until that Day, we gladly endure the reproach of men, holding fast the testimony of our Lord, and crying out with the final, longing prayer of the bride: “Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20).

APPENDIX A

The Faith Principle—A Historical Repudiation of Modern Simony

The modern machinery of simony thrives on a fundamental, unconfessed unbelief: the conviction that God will not fund what He commands unless ministers employ the manipulative marketing tactics of the secular world. To expose and eradicate this transactional gospel, we must examine the historical witness of men who violently repudiated the arm of the flesh. They did not build their ministries on orchestrated pledge drives, donor manipulation, book royalties, or personal branding. They operated entirely upon the “faith principle,” demonstrating that God alone is the sovereign Provider for His own work. Their proven ministries serve as a devastating indictment against the ecclesiastical merchants and so-called Christian authors of our generation who refuse to speak unless their financial demands are met.

The Reformation and Puritan Witness: The Cost of an Unmerchandised Pulpit

The repudiation of simony and the reliance on God's sovereign provision did not begin in the 19th century. Long before George Müller or Hudson Taylor articulated the "faith principle," the heroes of the Reformation and Puritan movements provided a blood-stained witness against the commodification of the gospel. They did not merely write about the dangers of a compromised pulpit; they surrendered their livelihoods, their freedom, and their lives rather than merchandise the Word of God or bend to the state's financial demands.

- **The Radical Reformers and the State Paycheck:** During the 16th century, the established church—both Catholic and magisterial Protestant—was deeply entangled with state power. Ministers were guaranteed salaries, parsonages, and comfortable living conditions so long as they remained loyal to the ruling authorities. But the Radical Reformers, particularly the early Anabaptists, fiercely rejected this system. They believed that tying a pastor's provision to a government decree or a wealthy patron inevitably compromised the radical demands of Christ. These men became itinerant heralds, preaching the gospel across Europe under the constant threat of execution, operating entirely by faith and relying on heaven's direct provision.
- **The Puritans and the Great Ejection of 1662:** In 1662, the English government passed the Act of Uniformity, requiring all ministers to swear an oath conforming entirely to the state church's Book of Common Prayer. Signing the oath meant keeping

their lucrative salaries and public platforms; refusing meant immediate termination and severe poverty. Nearly 2,000 Puritan ministers—including Richard Baxter, John Flavel, and Joseph Alleine—refused to sign, preferring poverty over simony.

- **John Bunyan and the Prison Pulpit:** John Bunyan, author of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, was told he would be released from jail if he simply promised to stop preaching without state permission. He chose to spend twelve years in a squalid Bedford jail rather than let men dictate when and where he could preach the gospel, trusting God to provide for his family.
- **August Hermann Francke and the Halle Orphanages:** Long before the modern celebrity pastor commodified the flock, August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) established a sprawling orphanage and educational ministry in Halle, Germany, with no visible safety net. He utterly refused to appeal to wealthy patrons through the customary flattery of his day. Instead, Francke drove his requests upward. He relied exclusively on desperate, believing prayer to the living God. When funds were entirely depleted, he did not launch a desperate fundraising campaign; he went to his knees, and the provisions arrived. His ministry was a living rebuke to the mercenary spirit, proving that a minister does not need to sell his dignity or his message to sustain a massive work of God.
- **George Müller and the Bristol Orphanages:** George Müller (1805–1898) remains the ultimate terror to the modern practitioner of simony. Müller cared for over 10,000 orphans in Bristol, England, without ever making a single public request for financial support.

His primary and stated goal was not merely to feed children, but to provide the world with undeniable, visible proof that the God of the Bible still answers prayer. Müller violently rejected the mechanics of religious merchandising. He refused a guaranteed pastoral salary, entirely abandoned the practice of pew-renting, and never incurred a single penny of debt. When the modern minister argues that marketing and manipulation are “necessary evils” for church growth, Müller’s life exposes that argument as a pragmatic lie. He proved that you do not have to sell your influence to men if you have learned how to leverage heaven through prayer.

- **Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission:** Hudson Taylor (1832–1905) drove this faith principle into the very heart of global missions. When he founded the China Inland Mission, he instituted an ironclad rule: his missionaries were strictly forbidden from soliciting funds. Taylor’s foundational maxim was as simple as it was unyielding: “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply.” He believed that directly appealing to men for money subtly dethroned God. His method was to move man through God, by prayer alone. In a contemporary, simony-driven culture where Christian authors demand lucrative publishing contracts and pastors refuse to minister without guaranteed honorariums, Taylor’s total financial abandonment to God exposes their avarice. He poured his life out on foreign soil without demanding a safety net, trusting the Master to feed His own servants.
- **L.R. Shelton, Jr. and the Global Literature Ministry:** L.R. Shelton, Jr. (1923–2003) provided one of the most staggering 20th-century rebukes to

the simony of Christian publishing. Through his leadership at Mt. Zion Bible Church and the establishment of Chapel Library, he oversaw the distribution of millions of gospel tracts, booklets, and paperbacks worldwide. His policy was as radical as it was biblical: he never sold anything, never attached a price tag, and never sent a fundraising letter. In an era where Christian authors and publishers demand strict royalties and pastors seek profit for their sermons, Brother Shelton trusted God to supply every dime. He truly lived his own maxim—"the way up is down"—proving that when a ministry is completely surrendered to the glory of Christ, heaven will fund the printing presses.

APPENDIX B

The Theological Repudiation of Simony—Voices from Church History

To prove that the Bagdad Declaration is not a novel critique but a return to historic, orthodox fidelity, we must examine the unbroken testimony of the church against the commodification of the ministry. From the early church councils to the blazing pens of the English Puritans, orthodox leaders have uniformly recognized that simony is not merely an administrative error; it is a damnable heresy that strikes at the absolute headship of Jesus Christ.

The Early Church and the Patristic Consensus

- **The Early Councils (Elvira and Chalcedon):** The earliest surviving church legislation against simony appears in Canon 48 of the Synod of Elvira (c. 305 AD), which explicitly forbade requiring donations for

baptisms. This was fortified globally at the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD), which decreed strict anathemas against any bishop who ordained a minister or transferred church property for money.

- **Pope Gregory the Great (c. 590-604):** Gregory I permanently cemented the term *simoniaca haeresis* in the theological lexicon, arguing that simony occurred whenever a spiritual office was acquired through “gifts of the hand” (money), “gifts of the mouth” (flattery and political maneuvering), or “gifts of deference” (subservience to wealthy patrons).
- **Humbert of Silva Candida (c. 1057):** Argued in *Three Books Against the Simoniacs* that ordinations rooted in simony were entirely invalid, noting that any man who buys his office—whether through money or influence—is entirely cut off from the Holy Spirit.

The Puritan Indictment of the Mercenary Minister

- **John Milton:** In *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church* (1659), Milton condemned ministers who viewed the pulpit as a lucrative trade, labeling them “hirelings” who fed themselves rather than the flock.
- **Richard Baxter:** In *The Reformed Pastor* (1656), Baxter obliterated pastoral pride and the insatiable desire for human applause, warning leaders against preaching orthodox doctrine while their hearts rotted with the desire for fame.
- **John Owen:** In *The True Nature of a Gospel Church* (1689), Owen argued that a pastoral calling is

validated solely by the Holy Spirit, never by financial transactions or worldly influence.

- **Thomas Brooks:** In *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* (1652), Brooks exposed the motives of corrupt ministers who “are men-pleasers” preaching more to please the ear and secure financial gain than to profit the heart.

APPENDIX C

The Expanded Definition of Simony—Prophets, Poets, and Martyrs

To isolate simony merely as the medieval sale of indulgences is a catastrophic historical error. The greatest theological minds and prophetic voices of church history understood that simony was far more insidious, condemning any intrusion of worldly commerce into the sanctuary.

- **Peter Damian (1052):** Argued in *Liber Gratissimus* that simony included the “intrusion of worldly values into the affairs of the Church,” condemning any pastor who imports consumer metrics and corporate branding into the bride of Christ.
- **Dante Alighieri (c. 1320):** Placed simoniacs upside down in the Eighth Circle of Hell in his *Inferno*, fiercely condemning ecclesiastical merchants for

taking the Church and prostituting her for money and power.

- **John Wycliffe (c. 1377):** Pinned *On Simony*, declaring that monetizing the spiritual message—including charging money for religious instruction or teaching—was outright theft.
- **Jan Hus (1413):** Defined simony as “an evil consent to exchange spiritual goods for nonspiritual” in his own treatise *On Simony*. He was eventually burned at the stake in 1415 for refusing to stop preaching against wealth-hoarding clerics.

APPENDIX D

Modern Rationalizations of Ecclesiastical Commercialism

Modern religious institutions justify these practices through a subtle, deeply ingrained system of pragmatic rationalization. When ministers and publishing entities baptize commercialism, they wrap their methods in the language of necessity, stewardship, and survival:

- **The Myth of Pragmatic Necessity:** Asserting that the modern church cannot survive without corporate structures, professional marketing, and paid distribution models.
- **The “Laborer Is Worthy of His Wages” Distortion:** Misapplying scriptural principles—such as Luke 10:7—to justify multi-million-dollar publishing empires, royalties, and proprietary paywalls.
- **The Business Model of Ministry:** Adopting the mindset of the corporate world, viewing ministries

as “brands,” congregations as “markets,” and spiritual resources as “products.”

- **Professionalization and the Expert Class:** Trading the biblical model of humble shepherds for an elite, specialized corporate caste requiring significant capital investment.
- **The Normalization of Culture:** Unconsciously conforming to surrounding Western commercialism where every transaction is monetized.
- **The Secularization of Stewardship (The Corporate CEO Model):** Replacing biblical eldership with secular growth metrics, net worth, and brand footprints.
- **The Inversion of the “Parable of the Talents”:** Twisting a parable about spiritual faithfulness into a divine mandate for religious venture capitalism and wealth accumulation.
- **The Illusion of Scale and Global Reach:** Believing the Gospel can only reach the ends of the earth if backed by massive, capital-intensive publishing houses and copyright protection.
- **The Protection of Intellectual Property as “Stewardship of Ideas”:** Rebranding copyright greed as a noble defense of personal authorship and creative integrity against “theft.”
- **The Comfort of Institutional Self-Preservation:** Choosing commercialism over faith because it offers the visible security of endowments, paywalls, and subscriptions, insulating institutions from depending directly on God.

APPENDIX E

Answering Objections

Objection 1: The Pragmatic Argument for Corporate Scale

OBJECTION: Critics will argue that modern global outreach requires corporate structures, professional marketing, multi-tiered publishing contracts, and steady cash flows. Without these, how can the church effectively fund major distribution or reach the ends of the earth?

ANSWER: This objection relies on a fundamental, unconfessed unbelief: the conviction that God will not fund what He commands unless ministers employ the manipulative marketing tactics of the secular world. The early church turned the world upside down without a single copyright, corporate subsidiary, or retail distribution contract. Furthermore, as the pioneer missionary J. Hudson Taylor famously stated, “**Depend on it, God’s**

work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."

Alongside George Müller's legacy, Taylor showed that God alone is the sovereign Provider for His work when it is done entirely by faith and prayer rather than commercial coercion. Relying on freewill offerings honors Christ and proves that the King's work is sustained by heaven, not market share.

Objection 2: The Legal Fear of Doctrinal Corruption and Plagiarism

OBJECTION: Observers will worry that discarding defensive copyright and paywalls leaves theological literature completely unprotected against malicious editing, unauthorized altering, or false teachers spreading heresy under the author's name.

ANSWER: The purity of doctrine and the protection of texts are guarded by the Holy Spirit and spiritual discernment, not secular courtrooms, copyright injunctions, or cease-and-desist orders. As established in Articles III and VII, if an error is introduced or a text is compromised, the New Testament remedy is faithful, face-to-face correction among brethren and the spiritual withdrawal of fellowship—never the carnal weapons of copyright infringement lawsuits. We trust the Holy Spirit to preserve His truth among a humble people who walk in love and holiness, knowing the divine principle that *"if anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God"* (John 7:17).

Objection 3: The Distortion of Pastoral Sustenance

OBJECTION: A common defense will cite Scripture—specifically that “the laborer is worthy of his wages”—to argue that authors, publishers, and pastors are entirely justified in demanding structured salaries, royalties, and commercial profit margins for their intellectual property.

ANSWER: This argument intentionally blurs the vital distinction between local, freewill support for a faithful shepherd (which Scripture affirms) and commercial enclosure, multi-million-dollar publishing royalties, and mandatory pricing that locks poor believers out of the Word of God (which 1 Timothy 6:5 and simony condemn). The laborer’s physical needs are met by the generous, voluntary offerings of the local flock, not by selling sacred truth as a commodity in the marketplace.

Objection 4: The Necessity of Intellectual Property Rights

OBJECTION: Authors will argue that their unique insights, theological frameworks, and manuscript labors are intellectual property that must be legally and financially guarded against theft or unauthorized commercial exploitation.

ANSWER: Rebranding copyright greed as a noble defense of personal authorship forgets that divine truth is

received as a free gift, not an invention of human genius. Paul fiercely guarded his freedom to preach the gospel without charge, refusing to abuse his authority in the ministry (1 Corinthians 9:18). When spiritual insights are monetized and locked behind proprietary paywalls, the ministry has ceased to be an act of grace and has degraded into a human enterprise designed to protect personal brand equity and financial security.

Objection 5: The Danger of Antinomianism and Lawlessness

OBJECTION: Critics will argue that removing all institutional rules, denominational oversight, and legal contracts opens the door wide to unbridled sectarianism, lawlessness, and spiritual chaos within independent assemblies.

ANSWER: True ecclesiastical order is maintained by the indwelling Holy Spirit and mutual submission to the Word of God, not by bureaucratic gatekeeping or external legal mandates. **Practical examples** appear throughout New Testament history and in unmerchandised fellowships, where local assemblies do not rely on a denominational headquarters or legally binding corporate bylaws to maintain discipline. Instead, when a practical dispute arises over doctrine or conduct, elders and members open the Scriptures together, practice face-to-face accountability, and resolve issues through prayer and mutual submission (Galatians 5:16). When local assemblies are bound together by a shared love for Christ rather than corporate

coercion, the body polishes and protects itself through genuine spiritual health rather than forced compliance.

Objection 6: The Economic Realities of Printing and Distribution Costs

OBJECTION: Realists will point out that paper, ink, printing presses, freight, and digital infrastructure require massive, predictable funding streams that freewill, uncalculated donations cannot reliably sustain.

ANSWER: This objection assumes that God is limited by human economic predictability. While costs are real, the early church and centuries of faith-funded ministries—such as Chapel Library and the Halle Orphanages—have repeatedly proved that when the people of God are given the joyful privilege of supporting truth without compulsion, generosity abounds (2 Corinthians 8:2-3). We cast our financial needs upon the Lord, trusting that He will provide the exact resources required to keep the presses running for His glory.

Objection 7: The Charge of Schism and Divisiveness

OBJECTION: Denominational leaders will accuse this declaration of being schismatic, arguing that it unnecessarily fractures the broader visible church by

creating a narrow, exclusionary faction over secondary matters of publishing and copyright.

ANSWER: The true schismatics are those who have commercialized the sanctuary and turned the Gospel into a commodity, not those calling for a return to apostolic purity. The Bible commands the faithful to “note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them” (Romans 16:17). Drawing a sharp, biblical line against the return of simony is not a fracture of Christ’s true body; it is a necessary, holy separation from the corrupt practices of religious merchandising.

APPENDIX F

Ecclesiastical Non-Complicity and Separation

To ensure that *The Bagdad Declaration* is understood not merely as an academic critique but as an active standard of fidelity, we affirm the biblical necessity of ecclesiastical separation. Where denominational boards, parachurch networks, publishing entities, or local assemblies persist in the commercialization of the Gospel, the merchandising of sacred literature, or the elevation of human brand-building after receiving faithful admonition, true heralds of Christ must maintain a clean conscience.

We invoke the apostolic command to separate from unrepentant corruption: “*And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather expose them*” (Ephesians 5:11). Aligning with this declaration requires refusing to participate in, endorse, or draw financial support from systems that treat the grace of God as merchandise. We separate ourselves from the modern machinery of simony, choosing rather to suffer

the reproach of men outside the camp, bearing Christ's disgrace (Hebrews 13:13), so that the purity and absolute headship of our Lord may be uncompromised in our generation.

APPENDIX G

A Call to Covenant Fellowship

We, the undersigned pastors, elders, and independent assemblies of believers, having examined the modern crisis of the commoditized Gospel and the systemic return of simony, do hereby solemnly pledge our alignment with *The Bagdad Declaration*. We renounce the commercial enclosure of spiritual resources, the fear of man, and the corporate enterprise model of ministry. We commit ourselves before Almighty God to practice and defend the unhindered, gratuitous distribution of theological truth, relying solely on the free-will support of God's people and the absolute headship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Signatory Name / Title:

Assembly / Fellowship:

Date:

Location:

APPENDIX H

Recommended Reading List for Further Study

To deepen your understanding of non-commercial ministry, historical faithfulness, and the Dorean Principle, we recommend the following foundational texts:

- *The Dorean Principle: A Biblical Framework for Free-Charge Ministry* by Conley Owens
- *The Ministry Belongs to Christ* by Joseph M. Jacowitz
- *The Reformed Pastor* by Richard Baxter (1656)
- *George Müller of Bristol* by Arthur T. Pierson
- *Hudson Taylor's Secret Source* by Howard and Geraldine Taylor
- *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church* by John Milton (1659)

