

## FFWPU Europe and the Middle East: 3 Stages Any Spiritual Community Goes Through

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*Michael Balcomb giving his sermon in Geneva, Switzerland 6th October 2024*

**Dr. Michael Balcomb describes in sermon the 3 stages a spiritual community goes through, according to the Book of Hebrews**

Part 1 of extracts from a sermon titled "Yesterday, Today and Forever", that Dr. Michael Balcomb, the President of the Europe and the Middle East Region of the [Family Federation for World Peace and Unification](#), gave at the Sunday service in Geneva, Switzerland on 6th October 2024. Slightly edited.

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You may recognise my title "Yesterday, Today and Forever". It's taken from the scripture reading we had, where it says,

"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today

and for ever." (Hebrews 13:8, RSV)

One of my favourites from the Book of Hebrews, is chapter 13, the last chapter, and the final encouragement to the community. [...]



*Michael Balcomb, delivering a sermon in London September 15, 2024*

As you know, I went to the theological seminary, and one of the things we did there was to look into the background of the different books of the Bible. We don't think about that so much these days, but the Book of Hebrews is a mysterious book. First of all, nobody really knows who wrote it. In the beginning, people thought it must be Paul, because most of the other books of the New Testament are by Paul.

But already, by the first century, people realised it's not Paul. It doesn't sound like him. It's not a letter; it's really a sermon. And it's a sermon directed at a very particular group of people. They think they're Hebrews, meaning those Jews who'd become Christians, probably around 60 to 70 AD. That was the time when Nero persecuted the Christians in Rome and throughout the Roman Empire.

In this book, the author goes through the three stages of that spiritual community, which I think is pretty much the three

stages of any spiritual community, including our own.

The first stage is the exciting one, when the community was established by disciples and evangelists who had met Jesus themselves, probably. They were full of the Holy Spirit and came to witness and be missionaries and pioneers.

And there were lots of miraculous works. Today, we might call them "great works". But people were healed, and there were revelations. People felt this enormous encouragement of the Holy Spirit.

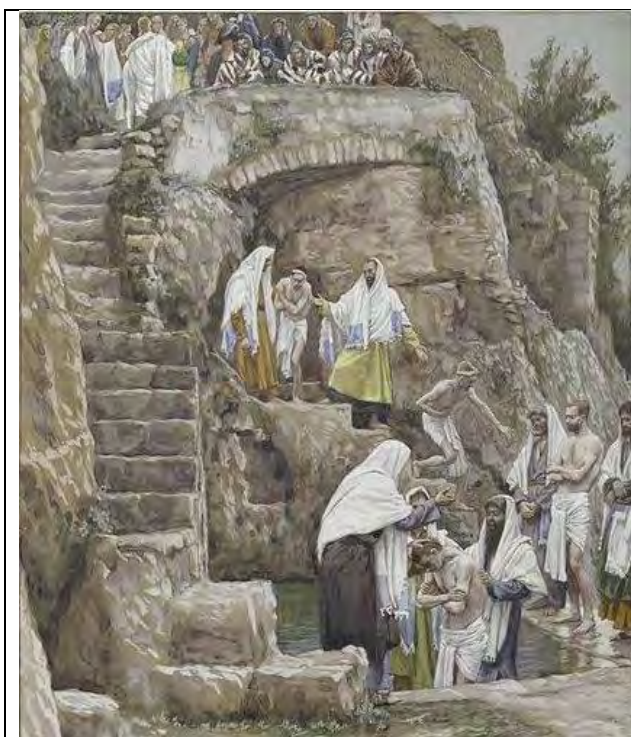
And that lasted for a while; we don't know how long, maybe 5 to 10 years or so.

But then they entered the second stage, and the second stage was much more difficult because they started to receive persecution and attacks.

That wasn't so bad, because as religious people somehow, we almost expect to be attacked from the enemy. We know that Satan wants the world to remain godless, and so we're not so surprised then, when there are attacks. [...]

But then there started to be internal persecution, and the community started to divide. People started

having arguments, according to the Book of Hebrews, about things like property and doctrine and who their real leader was.



*Hebrews turned Christians: The Disciples of Jesus Baptize. Watercolour painting by James Tissot (1836-1902*



*The stoning of Saint Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Painting by Hans von Aachen (1552-1615). Painting is now in Church of St. Stephen, Krakow, Poland*

We're talking about Hebrews now, not about any other organisation you may have heard of that has experienced such problems. This was a time of persecution, but still, because such matters aroused passion, the church moved forward. But now in the stage that the writer is describing, the community has begun to lose power, they began to lose their spirit.

And some of them, [...] began to think, "I wonder if we should have stayed Jewish." It was a bit like when the Israelites left Egypt, and halfway they began to think,

"I wonder if we should have stayed in Egypt. It seems like it was better there than it is here."

The author of Hebrews, his mission, or her mission perhaps, was to try to persuade people,

"Don't lose hope, don't give up, don't be tempted to go back, don't settle for the second best, because the real prize is ahead, and we should have confidence in that."

We too should give each other confidence, because, as you know, once any organisation or team loses confidence, everything can fall apart really quickly.

I like football, and I support a terrible team, but they're winning at the moment. But sometimes they can be winning by a lot, and then something happens. They kind of switch off in their brains, and suddenly they're losing. And the players are the same, the ball is the same, the opposition is the same, but they've lost their confidence. And because of that, everything seems too difficult.

Through much of the Book of Hebrews, the author encourages people,

"Actually, what we have in Jesus is much better than anything else that's ever happened and ever will be. This is it. This is the moment."

And of course, I would add to this, not "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever" - although, of course, that is true - but what I want to talk about this morning is "The True Parents, the same yesterday, today and forever".

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To be continued. Part 2 coming soon.

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