

What The Christian Church Should Be

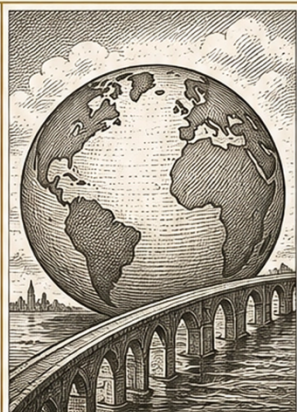
A Call to Be Historic, Reformed, and Relevant



• HISTORIC •



• REFORMED •



• RELEVANT •

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar

Pastor Emeritus, Th.B., A.B., D.D

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DEDICATION

*To every pastor, elder, and layperson
who has dared to ask:*

“What is the Church truly called to be?”

And to those who refuse to accept easy answers.

*To the congregations who heard these ideas first,
whose questions sharpened every argument herein.*

*And above all,
to the God who builds His Church,
and has promised that the gates of Hades
will not prevail against it.*

Soli Deo gloria.

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Foreword

The question this book sets out to answer is deceptively simple: What should the Christian Church be? Yet anyone who has spent time in the life of a local congregation — who has watched with both pride and grief as communities of faith rise, drift, reform, and sometimes fall — knows that this question is among the most vital a believer can ask.

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar has spent a lifetime in ministry asking precisely this question — not from the safety of an armchair, but from the trenches of pastoral service. What follows is not a theoretical exercise. It is a mature, earnest, and biblically grounded argument for a Church that is worth the name it bears.

The three pillars Dr. Niangar identifies — that the Church must be Historic, Reformed, and Relevant — are not arbitrary. They emerge from a careful reading of Scripture, an honest reckoning with Church history, and a shepherd's eye toward the people who fill the pews. Each chapter both challenges and encourages. You will be moved to examine not only your church but your own life.

Read this book slowly. Let its questions linger. And then — go and be the Church.

Preface

This book began as a sermon. Like most worthwhile things in ministry, it grew beyond its origins.

For many years I have preached on the identity and calling of the Church. In those years I have come to a settled conviction: the decline of spiritual vitality in many of our congregations is not primarily a crisis of culture or of resources — it is a crisis of identity. We have, in many places, forgotten what we are.

The Christian Church is not a social club, not a political platform, not a therapy group — though in different moments she serves functions that touch all of these. She is the Body of Christ, called to proclaim the gospel, to embody it, and to carry it into every corner of human existence. That calling is historic in its roots, reformed in its shape, and ever-relevant in its application.

It is my prayer that these pages serve not as a monument to ideas but as a spur to action — for your congregation, your community, and your own walk with God.

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar
Pastor Emeritus

Introduction

The Urgent Question

“And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”

— Matthew 16:18

Every generation must rediscover the Church. This is not because the Church changes her essential nature — she does not. The foundations laid by the apostles, confirmed in the Creed, and sealed in the blood of the martyrs, remain immovable. But every generation encounters those foundations from a new vantage point: new pressures, new seductions, new failures, and new opportunities.

Our generation is no exception. We live in a moment of extraordinary challenge for the body of Christ. In some parts of the world the Church is growing at a pace unprecedented in history. In others she is contracting with frightening speed, losing not only attendance but the cultural credibility that once opened doors of influence. Everywhere she is being asked to define herself — by her critics, by her governments, and, most importantly, by her Lord.

It is Jesus himself, in Matthew 16:18, who makes the foundational declaration: “I will build my church.” The Church is not a human project. She is divine in her origin, apostolic in her foundation, and eschatological in her destiny. Yet she is also undeniably human in her present form — made up of forgiven sinners who are still being sanctified, led by imperfect pastors who are still learning, and embedded in cultures and societies that press upon her from every side.

This book argues that a genuinely healthy Christian Church must embody three essential and interlocking qualities:

1. Really Historic

Rooted in the apostolic faith, committed to the historic gospel, and engaged in the Great Commission as Christ commanded.

2. Really Reformed

Honest about the ways she has drifted, courageous in her pursuit of renewal, and holistic in her engagement with the world.

3. Really Relevant

Supracultural in her values, intellectually serious in her engagement with ideas, and prophetically biblical in her address of politics and economics.

These three qualities are not independent options for the Church to select from a menu. They are interlocking realities. A Church that is historic but not reformed becomes a museum. A Church that is reformed but not relevant becomes a sect. A Church that is relevant but not rooted in history becomes a mirror of the age. Only the Church that is genuinely all three can fulfill her calling in the world.

PART ONE

Really Historic

“Church history is very vital to our Christian life!”

CHAPTER 1

Why Church History Matters

“So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.”

— 2 Thessalonians 2:15

The Danger of a Historyless Christianity

There is a temptation in every generation of Christians to begin again — to imagine that the Church can be rebuilt from scratch, that the accumulated wisdom, struggle, and witness of twenty centuries can be set aside in favor of something purer, simpler, more immediate. This temptation is understandable. History is messy. The Church’s record is not without blemish.

But to abandon history is not to purify the Church. It is to impoverish her. A Church without history is like a river without a source — it may flow for a time, but it carries nothing of depth and has nowhere

to go. The accumulated testimony of the saints, the hard-won formulations of doctrine, the martyrs' witness across centuries — these are not optional heritage. They are our inheritance.

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

— George Santayana

The Apostle Paul understood this. Writing to the Thessalonian believers, he urges them to “hold fast to the traditions” passed on by the apostles (2 Thess. 2:15). The Greek word translated “traditions” here is *paradosis* — that which is handed over, delivered from one generation to the next. The faith is not invented in each generation; it is received and transmitted.

Church history, properly understood, is the story of that handing over. It is the narrative of how the apostolic witness moved from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth — through councils and controversies, through revivals and reformations, through triumph and tragedy. To study it is not to engage in nostalgia. It is to understand the shape of the faith we have received and the call we now carry.

Apostolicity: The First Mark of a Historic Church

The Nicene Creed — formulated in 325 and 381 AD — describes the Church as “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.” Of these four marks, apostolicity is perhaps the most frequently misunderstood.

Apostolicity does not mean merely that a church traces its organizational lineage to the apostles through an unbroken succession of bishops. At its core, apostolicity means fidelity to apostolic teaching. A church is apostolic insofar as it believes and proclaims what the apostles believed and proclaimed.

The Apostles' Creed, recited in churches across the globe for centuries, is the distilled essence of that apostolic teaching. It affirms the Triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It affirms the incarnation of the eternal Son, his virgin birth, his suffering and death under Pontius Pilate, his resurrection and ascension, and his coming again in glory. It

affirms the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the resurrection of the body.

These are not negotiable peripherals. They are the irreducible core of Christian confession. A church that abandons or dilutes any of these affirmations has ceased to be apostolic, regardless of how large its congregation, how effective its programs, or how innovative its worship.

“Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand... For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.”

— 1 Corinthians 15:1–5

The Evangelical Accuracy of the Gospel

Paul’s summary in 1 Corinthians 15:1–5 is not systematic theology — it is gospel. “I passed on to you what I received,” he writes, and then delivers the substance: Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; he was buried; he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures; he appeared.

Every word here is load-bearing. “For our sins” — not as a martyr, not as a moral exemplar, but as the atoning sacrifice who bore the penalty of sin in our place. “According to the Scriptures” — this was not an accident of history but the fulfillment of divine promise. “He was buried” — the death was real; there was no illusion, no resuscitation. “He was raised” — in bodily resurrection, the vindication of the crucified Son. “He appeared” — to named individuals, in historical time, in verifiable encounters.

Evangelicality — the commitment to this good news in its full biblical accuracy — is what gives the Church her message. Without it, the Church has nothing distinctively Christian to offer. Only the Church carries the message of Jesus Christ crucified, risen, and coming again.

The Great Commission: History with a Mission

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

— Matthew 28:19–20

Church history is not an end in itself. The Church is historic in order to be missional — grounded in the past for the sake of the future. The Great Commission of Matthew 28 is not merely a directive to the Twelve standing on a Galilean hillside. It is the commission of the Church in every age.

“Go” — the default posture of the Church is not maintenance but movement. “Make disciples” — not merely converts, not merely adherents, but learners and followers. “Of all nations” — the scope is universal, crossing every ethnic, cultural, and geographic barrier. “Baptizing” and “teaching” — word and sacrament belong together in the formation of disciples.

Acts 1:8 adds a geographic dimension: “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” This is not a sequence to be completed and then set aside. It is a permanent calling — local and global, centripetal and centrifugal, never content with what has been reached.

A truly historic Church does not merely remember the Great Commission. She obeys it — in every generation, in every context, with every resource available to her.

Reflection Questions — Chapter 1

1. How familiar are you with the major movements and events of Church history? What steps could you take to deepen your understanding?

- 2.** When you recite the Apostles' Creed, do you engage with each affirmation as a living conviction or as a rote formula? Which phrase challenges you most?
- 3.** How does your local congregation embody the Great Commission? In what specific ways is it both locally rooted and globally reaching?

PART TWO

Really Reformed

“Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda.”

— The church reformed, always being reformed.

CHAPTER 2

Honest About Deformation

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.”

— 1 Timothy 4:1

The Reality of Deformation

One of the most painful things a Christian must come to terms with is that the Church — the community of the redeemed, the dwelling place of the Spirit, the pillar and foundation of truth — can and does go wrong.

The Scriptures do not shy away from this reality. Paul warns Timothy plainly that in later times, some will abandon the faith (1 Tim. 4:1). Peter speaks of false teachers among the people who will secretly introduce destructive heresies (2 Pet. 2:1). John writes to churches that have drifted

from their first love, tolerated false prophets, and grown complacent in their witness (Rev. 2–3).

Deformation takes many forms. There is doctrinal deformation — the gradual erosion of theological conviction, the softening of hard biblical truths to make them more culturally palatable. There is moral deformation — the accommodation of the Church’s ethical standards to the prevailing mores of the age. There is structural deformation — the corruption of church governance by power, wealth, or personality. And there is missional deformation — the inward turn of a Church that has forgotten her calling to the world.

“Ecclesia semper reformanda est.”

— The Church is always in need of reform.

The great cry of the sixteenth-century Reformation was not that the Church had been wrong from the beginning, but that she had drifted from her foundations — and that by the grace of God and the authority of Scripture, she could and must return. This is the perpetually valid insight of the Reformation tradition: the Church is always in need of reform because she is always in danger of deformation.

Lessons from the Letters to the Seven Churches

In Revelation 2 and 3, the risen Christ sends letters to seven actual congregations in Asia Minor. The phrase that recurs in each letter is striking: “I know your works.” The Lord is not indifferent to the condition of his churches. He sees.

To Ephesus, he commends doctrinal fidelity and hard work — but rebukes the loss of first love. To Smyrna, he offers comfort amid persecution. To Pergamum, he commends perseverance but rebukes the tolerance of false teaching. To Thyatira, he condemns the toleration of a false prophet. To Sardis, the devastating verdict: “You have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead” (Rev. 3:1). To Philadelphia, encouragement and promise. To Laodicea, the chilling rebuke: “Because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth” (Rev. 3:16).

These letters are not museum pieces. They are mirrors. In each congregation, we can recognize patterns that recur across the centuries — and patterns that may be visible in our own communities of faith. The Christ who spoke to those seven churches continues to say to churches in every age: “I know your works.”

That knowledge should humble us. It should also encourage us, because the letters of Revelation are not merely diagnoses — they are invitations. “To the one who is victorious,” Christ promises again and again: there is a way forward, a path of repentance, renewal, and restored faithfulness.

CHAPTER 3

The Church in Relationship to the World

“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

— Matthew 5:13–16

Salt and Light: A Holistic Vision

The Sermon on the Mount contains one of the most celebrated — and most misunderstood — descriptions of the Church’s relationship to the world. “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world”

(Matt. 5:13–14). These familiar metaphors carry more weight than their familiarity might suggest.

Salt in the ancient world served two primary functions: preservation and flavoring. The Church as salt preserves the world from total moral and spiritual corruption — not by imposing a theocracy, but by being a community of genuine virtue in the midst of the surrounding society. The Church also gives the world flavor — she brings depth, beauty, meaning, and direction to human life that would otherwise be impoverished.

But Jesus adds a warning: “If the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?” This is a description of deformation. A Church that has become indistinguishable from the surrounding culture — that has absorbed its values, its priorities, its moral assumptions — has lost precisely what makes it useful.

Light serves a different function. Where salt preserves and flavors, light illuminates and guides. The Church as light exposes what is hidden, reveals truth, and shows the way. And light cannot be hidden — a lamp is not lit in order to be covered with a bowl, but to give light to everyone in the house.

Together, these images describe a Church that is deeply engaged with the world — not withdrawn from it, not conformed to it, but present within it as a transforming and illuminating force.

The Ongoing Work of Reformation

A reformed Church is not a perfect Church. The Reformers themselves knew this, which is why the motto *ecclesia semper reformanda* was never meant as a slogan of complacency but as a call to continued vigilance.

Reformation is not a one-time event accomplished in the sixteenth century. It is a permanent posture — the posture of a Church that holds herself accountable to the Word of God in every generation, that is willing to repent of her failures, renew her commitments, and risk the discomfort of genuine change.

This requires honesty — the kind of honest institutional self-examination that is genuinely rare and genuinely costly. It requires

courage — the willingness to name what is wrong even when the naming creates conflict. And it requires humility — the recognition that the Church's authority is not self-generated but derived from the Word she is commissioned to proclaim.

Reflection Questions — Part Two

- 1.** In what ways has your own congregation drifted from the apostolic pattern? What specific reforms might be needed?
- 2.** Which of the seven churches of Revelation does your congregation most resemble? What is the implication of that resemblance?
- 3.** What does it mean in practice to be salt and light in your specific community? What concrete actions does this call for?

PART THREE

Really Relevant

“His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life.”

— 2 Peter 1:3

CHAPTER 4

Being Supracultural

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

— Romans 12:2

What Does It Mean to Be Supracultural?

The word supracultural — above or beyond culture — may be unfamiliar, but the concept is deeply biblical. It refers to the capacity of the Christian Church to be genuinely present within any culture, engaging its language, forms, and concerns, while remaining unabsorbed by its ultimate commitments and values.

This is, in essence, what Paul describes in Romans 12:1–2. “Do not conform to the pattern of this world” — do not allow the culture to press you into its mold, to define your values, your identity, your vision

of the good. “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” — allow the gospel, the Word, and the Spirit to reorient you from the inside out so that you see the world through different eyes.

The supracultural Church is not an anti-cultural Church. She does not flee from culture into a ghetto of religious insularity. She is present in culture — using its languages, engaging its questions, celebrating its genuine goods. But she is not captive to culture. She evaluates everything — every philosophical system, every political ideology, every social convention — in the light of the gospel.

The supracultural Church navigates between two perennial failures. Some churches become so identified with a particular culture that they lose their prophetic distinctiveness — they become chaplains to the status quo, blessing whatever the surrounding society does. Others become so detached from culture that they lose their missional engagement — they speak a language no one understands and address questions no one is asking. The supracultural Church is culturally fluent without being culturally captive.

The Renewing of the Mind

The engine of the supracultural life is what Paul calls the renewal of the mind. This is not merely intellectual — it encompasses the entire orientation of the self, the way one perceives reality, interprets experience, and makes decisions.

The renewing of the mind is the work of the Spirit through the Word. It happens in worship, in prayer, in the reading of Scripture, in the fellowship of the community of faith, in the sacraments. It is, above all, a posture of receptivity — the willingness to be corrected, to be surprised, to have one’s assumptions challenged by the living God.

A Church that consistently practices the renewal of the mind will be, over time, a Church with a genuinely distinctive way of seeing the world — not because she has withdrawn from the world, but because she has been formed by something other than the world.

CHAPTER 5

Engaging Philosophy, Science, and the Arts

“Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge.”

— 1 Timothy 6:20

The Intellectual Life of the Church

One of the persistent and damaging myths about Christianity is that it is fundamentally anti-intellectual — that it requires the abandonment of genuine inquiry in favor of unquestioning belief. Nothing could be further from the truth. The great intellectual tradition of the Church, from Justin Martyr to Augustine to Anselm to Aquinas to Calvin to Kuyper, is a tradition of fierce, disciplined, rigorous engagement with ideas.

The relevant Church is a Church that takes ideas seriously — because ideas have consequences. The philosophies, theories, and cultural movements that shape a generation’s understanding of reality will, inevitably, shape the context in which the Church must do her work. A Church that is ignorant of these movements is a Church ill-equipped to address the questions her neighbors are actually asking.

Paul’s encounter with the Athenian philosophers in Acts 17 is a model here. He does not dismiss the Greek intellectual tradition — he engages it, quotes its poets, and uses its categories to make his argument.

He finds points of genuine contact between the Greek search for the unknown God and the Christian proclamation of the God who has made himself known. His engagement is critical — he challenges and corrects as well as affirms — but it is never dismissive.

Engaging Valid Philosophy

When Paul warns Timothy against “what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Tim. 6:20), he is not warning against knowledge itself — he is warning against the pretension of knowledge, the ideological rigidity that masquerades as wisdom. The Church is called to be a student of valid philosophy: thinking seriously about questions of ultimate reality, human nature, ethics, and the good life, and bringing the light of Scripture to bear on those questions.

This requires both confidence and humility. Confidence, because the Christian worldview offers genuine resources for addressing the deepest philosophical questions. Humility, because the pursuit of understanding is never complete in this age, and the Church has much to learn even from those outside her community.

Science as Gift and Challenge

The relationship between Christian faith and natural science has been one of the most contested and frequently misrepresented stories in Western intellectual history. The popular narrative — that science and religion are inherently in conflict — is a myth, but it is a myth with real consequences for the Church’s public credibility.

The relevant Church engages science neither by capitulating uncritically to every consensus claim of the scientific establishment nor by retreating into defensive anti-intellectualism. She recognizes that science, rightly understood, is the study of the creation that God has made — and that genuine knowledge of the creation can only deepen our understanding of and wonder at the Creator.

The Arts as Witness and Exploration

Art — in its many forms, from visual art to music to literature to drama to film — is one of the primary ways that human beings make sense of their experience, explore moral complexity, and ask the deepest questions about existence. It is also one of the primary ways that the Church has, throughout her history, borne witness to the beauty and truth of the gospel.

The great cathedrals of Europe, the music of Bach and Handel, the poetry of Milton and Donne, the fiction of Dostoevsky and Flannery O'Connor — these are not decorative additions to the Church's work. They are, in their own right, acts of worship and witness. They express what cannot be fully said in propositions — the beauty of holiness, the darkness of sin and suffering, the hope of redemption.

A relevant Church cultivates the arts as part of her life and witness. She produces artists, supports their work, creates space for beauty and creativity in worship and in community life, and engages seriously with the cultural artifacts her neighbors are actually consuming and being formed by.

CHAPTER 6

Biblical Engagement with Politics and Economics

“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge.”

The Political Temptation

Few areas of contemporary church life are more contested — and more in need of careful biblical reflection — than the Church’s engagement with politics. In many parts of the world, churches have allowed themselves to become partisan actors in political conflicts, identifying the cause of God with the cause of a particular party, candidate, or ideology. The result has been the corruption of Christian witness and the alienation of those outside the Church who might otherwise have been open to the gospel.

But the answer to the error of partisanship is not the equal error of political abstinence. The relevant Church does not pretend that politics is irrelevant to the gospel — it is not. The way societies are organized, the laws that govern common life, the distribution of power and resources — these are matters of profound moral significance, and the Church has both the right and the responsibility to speak to them.

The key word here is “biblical.” The Church engages politics seriously and biblically — bringing the ethical norms of Scripture to bear on political questions, advocating for justice and human dignity, speaking for the voiceless — without enslaving herself to any particular political program or party. She is accountable not to a political constituency but to the Word of God.

Economic Dimensions of the Kingdom

The Scriptures have a great deal to say about economic life. The Torah’s provisions for the poor — gleaning laws, the Year of Jubilee, the sabbath rest for land and people — express a vision of economic life ordered by concern for human dignity and communal solidarity. The prophets thunder against the exploitation of the poor and the accumulation of unjust wealth. Jesus speaks more about money than almost any other subject.

A biblically relevant Church takes these economic dimensions of the gospel seriously. She evaluates every economic arrangement by the biblical criteria of justice, dignity, and the care of the vulnerable. She produces people who think carefully and biblically about economic life — about how they use their money, how they treat their employees or employers, how they relate to the poor in their community, and how they advocate for economic arrangements that reflect the justice and mercy of God.

“Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature.”

— 2 Peter 1:4

Reflection Questions — Part Three

1. In what ways has your congregation been shaped more by the surrounding culture than by the gospel? What specific changes might the renewing of the mind require?
2. How does your congregation engage with intellectual and cultural life? Is there room for more serious engagement with philosophy, science, or the arts?
3. How does your congregation understand its relationship to politics and economics? Is that understanding genuinely biblical, or does it reflect other influences?

Conclusion

A Church Worth the Name

“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

— Matthew 5:14–16

We have traveled a long road in these pages. We have examined the call to be a genuinely historic Church — rooted in apostolic teaching, faithful to the evangelical gospel, obedient to the Great Commission. We have wrestled with the hard truth that the Church can and does deform, and with the ongoing call to reformation that follows from that truth. We have explored what it means to be a relevant Church — supracultural in her values, intellectually serious in her engagement with ideas, and prophetically biblical in her address of political and economic life.

These are not three separate agendas. They are one integrated vision of ecclesial health. The historic Church is also a reformed Church, because only a Church that acknowledges her history — including her failures — can be truly reformed. The reformed Church is also a relevant Church, because the Reformation’s deepest insight — that the Word of God must be brought into contact with all of life — is precisely what drives the Church toward cultural engagement. The relevant Church is also a historic Church, because genuine relevance is not the accommodation of the gospel to the spirit of the age but the application of the timeless gospel to the concrete questions of every age.

We are His Church. We should reflect Him properly.

The call of this book is not, in the end, a call to institutional reform. It is a call to personal and communal faithfulness. The Church is made up of people — people who are being formed by the Spirit of God into the image of Jesus Christ. The health of the Church begins with the health of her members. The relevance of the Church begins with the renewed minds of her people. The reformation of the Church begins with the honest self-examination of the individuals who comprise her.

And so we return to the personal questions at the heart of this book: Do we recognize the facts of Church history — including its failures and its triumphs? Are we reformed in our lives — not just in our doctrinal statements, but in the actual pattern of how we live? Are we truly relevant — genuinely present to the world around us, speaking to its real questions with the transforming power of the gospel?

If we can answer yes to these questions — not perfectly, not without ongoing struggle, but genuinely — then we are becoming the kind of Church that Jesus Christ is building: the Church that the gates of Hades will not overcome.

Let us be better students of history, especially Church history. Let us be truly reformed in theology and life. Let us be always relevant to our times. And in all of this, let our light shine before others — that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in heaven.

Soli Deo gloria.

APPENDIX A

The Apostles' Creed

Recited by the Church catholic across more than sixteen centuries, the Apostles' Creed remains the most concise summary of the apostolic faith delivered once for all to the saints (Jude 3). It is presented here in the traditional Western form.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth;

And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.

APPENDIX B

Key Scripture References

On the Church's Foundation

Matthew 16:18	<i>The Promise of Christ to Build His Church</i>
Ephesians 2:19–22	<i>Built on the Foundation of the Apostles and Prophets</i>
1 Timothy 3:15	<i>The Church as Pillar and Foundation of Truth</i>

On Apostolicity and the Gospel

1 Corinthians 15:1–8	<i>The Gospel Paul Received and Passed On</i>
Galatians 1:8–9	<i>No Other Gospel</i>
Jude 3	<i>Contending for the Faith Once Delivered</i>

On Reformation and Renewal

Romans 6:17	<i>Obedying from the Heart</i>
Revelation 2–3	<i>Letters to the Seven Churches</i>
2 Timothy 3:16–17	<i>Scripture for Correction and Training</i>

On Cultural Engagement

Romans 12:1–3	<i>Transformed, Not Conformed</i>
Colossians 2:8	<i>Hollow and Deceptive Philosophy</i>
Acts 17:16–34	<i>Paul at the Areopagus</i>

On Politics and Economics

Micah 6:8	<i>Justice, Mercy, and Humility</i>
Luke 4:18–19	<i>The Year of the Lord's Favor</i>
Matthew 25:31–46	<i>Serving the Least of These</i>

APPENDIX C

A Guide for Group Discussion

This guide is designed for use in small groups, Sunday school classes, or leadership retreats. The questions are intended to facilitate honest conversation and practical application — not merely intellectual discussion.

Session 1: Are We Really Historic?

1. What is the earliest period of Church history your congregation is familiar with? What gaps exist in your collective historical awareness?
2. Recite the Apostles' Creed together. Which phrases generate the most questions or conversation?
3. How does your congregation understand and practice the Great Commission? Where are the growing edges?

Session 2: Are We Really Reformed?

1. What are the most significant ways your congregation has drifted from biblical faithfulness in the past decade?
2. Read the letters to the seven churches (Rev. 2–3). Which congregation's description most fits your own? What does Jesus commend? What does he challenge?
3. What would genuine reformation look like in your context? Who would need to lead it? What would it cost?

Session 3: Are We Really Relevant?

- 1.** In what ways is your congregation culturally fluent? In what ways is it culturally captive?
- 2.** How does your congregation engage with the intellectual life of your community? Are there opportunities for deeper engagement with philosophy, science, or the arts?
- 3.** What political and economic issues most affect your community? How might a biblical engagement with these issues shape your congregation's witness?

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Soli Deo gloria.

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar

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About the Author

Pastor Baltazar A. Niangar is a Pastor Emeritus who holds the degrees of Th.B. (Bachelor of Theology), A.B. (Bachelor of Arts), and D.D. (Doctor of Divinity). He has devoted his life and ministry to the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the theological formation of God's people, and the equipping of pastoral leaders for faithful service in church and society.

Dr. Niangar served for many years in partnership with Holistic Enhancement for Lay-leaders and Pastors (HELP, Inc.), a ministry organization committed to equipping the whole people of God for faithful service in church and society. He has preached and taught across multiple cultural and ecclesiastical contexts, bringing the riches of the Reformed and evangelical theological tradition to bear on the practical challenges of pastoral ministry.

His theological formation reflects deep engagement with the great tradition of the Church, from the ancient Fathers through the magisterial Reformers to the modern Reformed and evangelical theologians. The three convictions at the heart of this book — that the Church must be historic, reformed, and relevant — have been forged over decades of ministry in which all three qualities have been tested, challenged, and ultimately confirmed.

This book is his invitation to every believer and every congregation to ask, with fresh urgency and genuine honesty, the question the Church can never afford to stop asking: What should the Christian Church be?