

CHAPTER I

THE NEW TESTAMENT CONCEPTION OF THE CHURCH

AND I say also unto thee, that thou art *Petros*, and on this *petra* I will build My Church (Ecclesia); and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.”¹ Our Lord was far from Galilee and farther from Jerusalem when He uttered these words. He was sojourning in an almost wholly pagan land. The rocks overhanging the path were covered with the mementos of a licentious cult; and in the neighbouring city of Caesarea Philippi Herod Philip had built and consecrated a temple to the Emperor Augustus, who was there worshipped as a god.² It was among

¹ Matt. xvi. 18. Some modern critics (cf. Schmiedel in the *Encyc. Bibl.*, p. 3105) declare that this passage could not have come from the lips of our Lord in the form in which it has been recorded, and in particular that He could not have used the word “ecclesia”; the main reason given being that our Lord sought to reform hearts and not external conditions. To argue from that statement, however true it may be, that Jesus had no intention of founding a religious community and could not have used the word “church,” seems to me to be purely subjective and therefore untrustworthy reasoning. Besides, the use of the word by St. Paul in Gal. i. 13, shows that St. Paul found the word existing within Christian circles when he embraced the new faith; and to find it in common use at so early a period entitles us, in my judgment, to trace it back to Jesus Himself. The trend of modern criticism has been to place St. Paul’s conversion much closer to the crucifixion than it was formerly held to be. St. Paul implies that the words of the eucharistic formula (Mk. xiv. 22-24, Matt. xxvi. 26-28) came from Jesus; he takes it for granted that every one who becomes a Christian (himself included) must be baptized. We have thus, quite independently of the Gospels or of the Acts, “church,” “baptism,” “the eucharist”—all implying a religious community, all in common use at a time scarcely two years after the death of our Lord. That entitles us to attribute them to Jesus Himself.

² Compare Josephus, *Antiq.* XV. x, 3; *Bell. Jud.* I, xxi, 3; See also

scenes which showed the lustful passions of man's corrupt heart and the statecraft of Imperial Rome seating themselves on the throne of God, that Jesus made to His followers the promise which He has so marvellously fulfilled.

The word translated Church is *Ecclesia*—a word that had a history both theocratic and democratic, and that came trailing behind it memories both to the Jews who were then listening to Him, and to the Greeks, who, at a later period, received His Gospel. To the Jew, the *Ecclesia* had been the assembly of the congregation of Israel,¹ summoned to meet at the door of the Tabernacle of Jehovah by men blowing silver trumpets. To the Greek the *Ecclesia* was the sovereign assembly of the free Greek city-state,² summoned by the herald blowing his horn through the streets of the town. To the followers of Jesus it was to be the congregation of the redeemed and therefore of the free, summoned by His heralds to continually appear in the presence of their Lord, who was always to be in the midst of them. It was to be a theocratic democracy.

Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes* (1898, 3rd ed.), ii. 158 f.; G. A. Smith, *Historical Geography of Palestine*, p. 473 ff.; Wissowa, *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (1902), p. 284, n. 3.

¹ Numbers x. 2, 3. In the Old Testament two words are used to denote the assembling of Israel, *qāhāl* and *'edāh*; the former is translated "assembly" and the latter "congregation" in the Revised Version. In the Septuagint *ἐκκλησία* is almost always used to translate *qāhāl*, and *συναγωγή* to translate *'edāh*. Both Greek words appear continually in the later Hellenistic Judaism, and it is difficult to distinguish their meanings; but Schürer is inclined to think that *συναγωγή* means the assembly of Israel as a matter of fact; while *ἐκκλησία* has always an ideal reference attached to it. Compare Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes* (3rd ed. 1898), ii. 432, n. 10; Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, pp. 5-7.

² This is the common use of the word in classical Greek; in the later Greek the word denotes any popular assembly, even a disorderly one; it is this use that is found in Acts xix. 41. Dio Cassius uses the word to denote the Roman comitia or ruling popular assembly of the sovereign Roman people. The ruling idea in the word, whether in classical or in Hellenistic Greek, is that it denotes an assembly of the *people*, not of a committee or council. Against this view compare Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches* (1881), p. 30, n. 11; and for a criticism of Hatch, see Sohm, *Kirchenrecht* (1892), i. 17, n. 4;

The New, if it is to be lasting, must always have its roots in the Old; and the phrase "My Ecclesia" recalled the past and foretold the future. The roots were the memories the word brought both to Jew and to Greek; and the promise and the potency of the future lay in the word "My." The *Ecclesia* had been the congregation of Jehovah; it was in the future, without losing anything of what it had possessed, to become the congregation of Jesus the Christ. Its heralds, like James, the brother of our Lord, could apply to it the Old Testament promises, and see in its construction the fulfilment of the saying of Amos about the rebuilding of the Tabernacle of David;¹ or, like St. Paul, could call it the "Israel of God," and repeat concerning it the prayer of the Psalm, "Remember thine *ecclesia*, which Thou hast purchased of old, which Thou hast redeemed to be the tribe of Thine inheritance."² It had been the self-governing Greek republic, ruled by elected office-bearers; hereafter the communities of Christians, which were to be the *ecclesiae*, were to be little self-governing societies where the individual rights and responsibilities of the members would blend harmoniously with the common good of all.

The word with its memories and promises appealed to none of our Lord's "Sent Ones" more strongly than to St. Paul, who was at once an "Hebrew of the Hebrews," and the apostle to the Gentiles. The term "ecclesia" has its home in the Pauline literature.³ It is met with 110 times within the New Testament, and of these 86 occur in the Epistles of St. Paul and in the Acts of the Apostles. We naturally turn to the writings of St. Paul to aid us in expounding the thought which is contained in the term. When we do so we are entitled to say that the conception contains at least five different ideas which embody the essential features of the "Church of Christ."

The New Testament Church is fellowship with Jesus and with

¹ Acts xv. 16; cf. Amos ix. 11.

² Gal. vi. 16; Acts xx. 28; cf. Ps. lxxiv. 2.

³ Weizsäcker, *Jahrbücher für deutsche Theologie*, xviii, 481.

the brethren through Him; this fellowship is permeated with a sense of unity; this united fellowship is to manifest itself in a visible society; this visible society has bestowed upon it by our Lord a divine authority; and it is to be a sacerdotal society. These appear to be the five outstanding elements in the New Testament conception of the Church of Christ.

1. The Church of Christ is a *fellowship*. It is a fellowship with Jesus Christ; that is the divine element in it. It is a fellowship with the brethren; that is the human element in it. The Rock on which the Church was to be built was a *man confessing*—not the man apart from his confession, as Romanists insist, nor the confession apart from the man, as many Protestants argue. It was a man in whom long companionship with Jesus and the revelation from the Father had created a personal trust in His Messianic mission;¹ and the faith which had grown out of the fellowship had the mysterious power of making the fellowship which had created it more vivid and real; for faith, in its primitive sense of personal trust, is fellowship become self-conscious. Faith is what makes fellowship know itself to be fellowship, and not haphazard social intercourse.

The faith of Peter, *seer* as he was into divine mysteries, and *prophet* as he was, able to utter what he had seen, did not involve a very adequate apprehension of the fellowship he had confessed. He knew so little about its real meaning that shortly after his confession he made a suggestion which would have destroyed it;² a thought prompted by the Evil One succeeded the revela-

¹ The rock on which the Church is founded is "a human character acknowledging our Lord's divine Sonship." Gore, *The Church and the Ministry*, 3rd ed. p. 38. "In virtue of this personal faith vivifying their discipleship, the Apostles became themselves the first little Ecclesia, constituting a living rock upon which a far larger and ever enlarging Ecclesia should very shortly be built slowly up, living stone by living stone, as each new faithful convert was added to the society." Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 17.

² Matt. xvi. 22, 23. The suggestion of the Evil One to Peter, and presented to our Lord by Peter—the possibility of Messiahship without suf-

tion from the Father—so strangely and swiftly do inspirations of God and temptations of the Devil succeed each other in the minds of men. The sad experience of Peter has been shared by the Church in all generations. He did not cease to be the Rock-Man in consequence; nor has the promise failed the Church which was founded on him and on his confession, although it has shared his weakness and sin.

St. Paul rings the changes on this thought of fellowship with Jesus which makes the Church. The churches addressed in his epistles are described as *in Christ Jesus*. He is careful to impress on believers the personal relation in which they stand to their Lord, even when he is addressing the whole Church to which they belong. If he writes to the Church of God which is in Corinth,¹ he is careful to add "to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints"; and in his other epistles he addresses the brethren individually as "saints," "saints and faithful brethren," "all that are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints."² The individual believer is never lost in the society, and he is never alone and separate. The bond of union is not an external framework impressed from without, but a sense of fellowship springing from within. The believer's union to Christ, which is the deepest of all personal things, always involves something social. The call comes to him singly, but seldom solitarily.

fering—met the Saviour at the great moments of His earthly ministry; at the beginning, in the Temptation scene; here, when he had the vision and gave the promise of the Church; at the end, in the Garden of Gethsemane. There are indications in the Gospels that it was the temptation never absent from his mind. In the form in which it presents itself to His followers—the possibility of saving fellowship with Jesus apart from trust on a suffering Saviour—it has perhaps also been the crowning temptation of His Church and followers. If our Lord alluded to this special temptation when He said to St. Peter, near the end, "Simon, Simon, behold Satan asked to have you that he might sift you as wheat," as is most likely from His references to His own temptations and to St. Peter's relation to his brethren, there is a delicate suggestion of fellowship softening rebuke and vivifying the promise; Luke xxii. 31.

¹ 1 Cor. i. 2. ² Phil. i. 1; Eph. i. 1; Col. i. 2; Rom. i. 7.

Perhaps, however, St. Paul's conception of the fellowship with Christ which is the basis of the Church, comes out most clearly in the way he speaks of the "gifts" of grace, the *charismata*, which manifest the abiding presence of our Lord in His Church and His continuing fellowship with His people.¹ He enumerates them over and over again. He points to "apostles," the missionary heralds of the Gospel; to "prophets," to whom the Spirit had given special powers for the edification of the brethren; to "teachers," who are wise with the wisdom of God, and have those divine intuitions which the apostle calls "knowledge"; to "pastors," who feed the flock in one community. He speaks of "helps" (*ἀντιλήψεις*) or powers to assist the sick, the tempted and the tried; of "insight" to give wise counsels; of gifts of rule (*κυβερνήσεις*); of gifts of healing, and in general of all kinds of service. They are all gifts of the Spirit, and are all so many different manifestations of the presence of Jesus and of the living fellowship which His people have with Him.²

These various gifts are bestowed on different members of the Christian society for the edification of all, and they serve to show that it is one organism, where the whole exists for the parts, and each part for the whole and for all the other parts. They also show that the Christian society is not a merely natural organism; there is divine life and power within it, because it has the abiding presence of Christ; and the proof of His presence is the possession and use of these various "gifts," all of which come from the one Spirit of Christ in fulfilment of the promise that He will never leave nor forsake His Church. Their presence is a testimony to the presence of the Master which each Christian community can supply. It is a Church of Christ if His presence is manifested by these fruits of the Spirit which come

¹ 1 Cor. xii.; Eph. iv. 4-13; Rom. xii. 3-16. It is important to notice that St. Paul, in Rom. xii. 7, makes *διακονία* a "gift" which manifests the presence of Christ, and that this word is used to mean any kind of "ministry" within the Church. See below p. 62.

² See p. 63 n.

from the exercise of the "gifts" which the Spirit has bestowed upon it; for the Church as well as the individual Christian is to be known by its fruits.¹

This sense of hidden fellowship with its Lord was the secret of the Church. It was a bond uniting its members and separating them from outsiders more completely than were the initiated into the pagan mysteries sundered from those who had not passed through the same introductory rites. While Jesus lived their fellowship with Him was the external thing which distinguished them from others. They were His disciples (*μαθηταί*) gathered round a centre, a Person whom they called Rabbi, Master, Teacher—names they were taught not to give to another. They shared a common teaching and drank in the same words of wisdom from the same lips; but even then they could not be called a "school," for they were united by the bond of a common hope and a common future. They were to share in the coming kingdom of God in and through their relation to their Master. After His departure the other side of the fellowship became the prominent external thing—their relation to each other because of their relation to their common Lord. New names arose to express the change, names suggesting the relation in which they stood to each other. They were the "brethren," the "saints," and they had a fellowship (*κοινωνία*) with each other.² This thought of fellowship, as we shall see, was the ruling idea in all Christian organization. All Christians within one community were to live in fellowship with each other; different Christian communities were to have a common fellowship. Visible fellowship with each other, the outcome of the hidden fellowship with Jesus, was to be at once the leading characteristic of all Christians and the bond which united them to each other and separated them from the world lying outside.

¹ For St. Paul's statement about the "gifts" compare Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, pp. 153-70; Heinrici, *Das Erste Sendschreiben des Apostel Paulus an die Korinther* (1880), pp. 347-463; Kühl, *Die Gemeindeordnung in den Pastoralbriefen* (1885), pp. 42-49.

² Weizsäcker, *The Apostolic Age* (English translation), I. p. 44 ff.

2. The second characteristic of the Church of Christ is that it is a *Unity*. There was one assembly of the congregation of Israel; one sovereign assembly of the Greek city-state. There is *one* Church of Christ.

It must be admitted that the *word* Church is seldom used in the New Testament to designate one universal and comprehensive society. On the contrary, out of the 110 times in which the word occurs, no less than 100 do not contain this note of a wide-spreading unity. In the overwhelming majority of cases the word "church" denotes a local Christian society, varying in extent from all the Christian congregations within a province of the Empire to a small assembly of Christians meeting together in the house of one of the brethren. St. Paul alone,¹ if we except the one instance in Matt. xvi., uses the word in its universal application; and he does it in two epistles only—those to the Ephesians and to the Colossians—both of them dating from his Roman captivity.² But there are numberless indications that the thought of the unity of the Church of Christ was never

¹ It ought to be noted, however, that although we do not find the word "ecclesia" in 1 Peter, we do find the thought of the unity of all believers strongly expressed in a variety of ways: "Ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter ii. 9); and in v. 17 we have the word "brotherhood" used to bring out the same idea. This word in the early centuries was technically used as synonymous with *ecclesia*. See below p. 21. The double meaning of *ecclesia* is found in Matt. xvi. 18 compared with Matt. xviii. 17. In the Apocalypse the unity is expressed in the phrase "the Bride, the Lamb's wife," and the plurality in the "Seven Churches" (Rev. xxi. 9; ii. 1, etc.).

² The various passages in which the word "ecclesia" occurs in the sense of the Christian society have often been collected and grouped. The following classification is based on that of Dr. Hort.

- i. The word "ecclesia," in the singular and with the article, is used to denote:—
 1. The original Church of Jerusalem and Judea, when there was no other; Acts v. 11; viii. 1, 3; Gal. i. 13; 1 Cor. xv. 9; Phil. iii. 6.
 2. The sum total of the churches in Judea, Samaria and Galilee; Acts ix. 31.
 3. The local church:—*Jerusalem*, Acts xi. 22; xii. 1, 5; xv. 4; *Thessalonica*, 1 Thess. i. 1; 2 Thess. i. 1, *Corinth*, 1 Cor. i. 2;

absent from the mind of the Apostle. The Christians he addresses are all brethren, all saints, whether they be in Jerusalem, Damascus, Ephesus or Rome. The believers in Thessalonica are praised because they had been "imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea," who "are in Jesus Christ" as the Thessalonians "are in Jesus Christ."¹ The Epistles to the Corinthians are full of exhortations to unity within the local

vi. 4; xiv. 12, 23; 2 Cor. i. 1; Rom. xvi. 23. *Cenchrea*, Rom. xvi. 1. *Laodicea*, Col. iv. 16. *Antioch*, Acts xiii. 1; xv. 2. Each of the *Seven Churches of Asia*, Rev. ii. iii. *Ephesus*, Acts xi. 26; xiv. 27; xx. 17; 1 Tim. v. 16. *Caesarea*, Acts xviii. 22. Also in Jas. v. 14; 3 John 9, 10.

4. The assembly of a local church:—Acts xv. 22; 1 Cor. xiv. 23.

5. The *House Church*:—at *Ephesus*, 1 Cor. xvi. 19; at *Rome*, xvi. 5; at *Colossae*, Col. iv. 15; Philem. 2.

ii. The word "ecclesia," in the singular and without the article, is used to denote:—

1. Every local church within a definite district:—Acts xiv. 23.

2. Any or every local Church:—1 Cor. xiv. 4; iv. 17; Phil. iv. 15; and probably 1 Tim. iii. 5, 15.

3. The assembly of the local church:—1 Cor. xiv. 19, 35; xi. 18; 3 John 6.

iii. The word "ecclesia" in the plural is used to denote:—

1. The sum of the local churches within a definite district, the name being given or implied:—*Judea*, 1 Thess. ii. 14; Gal. i. 22 *Galatia*, 1 Cor. xvi. 1; Gal. i. 2. *Syria and Cilicia*, Acts xv. 41, *Derbe and Lystra*, Acts xvi. 5, *Macedonia*, 2 Cor. viii. 1, 19, *Asia*, 1 Cor. xvi. 19; Rev. i. 4, 11, 20; ii. 7, 11, 17, 29; iii. 6, 13, 22; xxii. 16.

2. An indefinite number of local churches:—2 Cor. xi. 8, 28; viii. 23, 24; Rom. xvi. 4, 16.

3. The sum total of all the local churches:—2 Thess. i. 4; 1 Cor. vii. 17; xi. 16; xiv. 33; 2 Cor. xii. 13.

4. The assemblies of all the local churches:—1 Cor. xiv. 34.

iv. The word "ecclesia" is used in the singular to denote:—

1. The one universal Church as represented in the individual local Church:—1 Cor. x. 32; xi. 22; (and probably) xii. 28; Acts xx. 28; (and perhaps) 1 Tim. iii. 5, 15.

2. The one universal Church absolutely:—Col. i. 18, 24; Eph. i. 22; iii. 10, 21; v. 23, 24, 25, 27, 29, 32.

Compare also Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, p. 571 ff.; Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, pp. 116-118.

¹ 1 Thess. ii. 14; cf. i. 1.

church, and the warnings are always based on principles which suggest the unity of the whole wide fellowship of believers. The divisions in the church at Corinth had arisen from a misguided apostolic partizanship which implied a lack of belief in Christian unity at the centre; the apostle repudiates this by holding forth the unity of Christ, and by pointing to the one Kingdom of God to be inherited.¹ He has the same message for all the local churches. However varied in environment they may be, these local churches have common usages, and ought to unite in showing a common sympathy with each other.²

Besides these minor indications of the thought, we have, in various of his epistles what may be called its poetic expression. The Church of Christ is such a unity that it has thrown down all the walls of race, sex, and social usages which have kept men separate.³ It has reconciled Jew and Gentile. It has bridged the gulf between the past of Israel and the present of apostolic Christianity.⁴

These thoughts and phrases, which run through all the epistles of St. Paul, lead directly to the description of the glorious unity of the one Church of Christ which fills the great Epistle to the Ephesians. Thus, though it is true that we cannot point to a single use of the word "church" in the earlier epistles which can undoubtedly be said to mean a universal Christian society, the thought of this unity of all believers runs through them all. The conception of the unity of the Church of Christ is one of the abiding possessions of St. Paul in the earliest as in the latest of his writings; but it is only in the writings of his Roman captivity that it attains to its fullest expression.⁵

¹ 1 Cor. i. 12, 13; vi. 9.

² 1 Cor. iv. 17; vii. 17; xi. 2, 23; xvi. 1.

³ Gal. iii. 28. ⁴ Rom. xi. 17.

⁵ Professor Ramsay traces a growth of definiteness in St. Paul's use of the word "Church" from its application to a single congregation to its use to denote what he calls the "Unified Church," and ingeniously connects the use in each case with political parallels. Thus the phrase "the Church of the Thessalonians" corresponds in civil usage to the *ecclesia*

This unity of the Church of Christ which filled the mind of St. Paul was something essentially spiritual. It is a reality, but a reality which is more ideal than material. It can never be adequately represented in a merely historical way. It is true that we can trace the beginnings of the formation of Christian communities, and the gradual federation of these Christian societies into a wide-spreading union of confederate churches; but that only faintly expresses the thought of the unity of the Church of Christ. It is true that we can see in the fellowship of Christians the illustration of the pregnant philosophical thought that it is not good for man to be alone, and that personality itself can only be rightly conceived when taken along with the thought of fellowship.¹ Apart, however, from all surface facts and philosophical ideas, there is something deeper in the unity of the Christian Church, something which lies implicitly in the unformed faith of every believer, that in personal union with Christ there is union with the whole body of the redeemed, and that man is never alone either in sin or in salva-

of the Greek city-state, while the phrase "the Church in Corinth," suggesting as it does, "the Church" in other places as well as in Corinth, corresponds in civil usage to a universal and all-embracing political organization like the Roman Empire. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, pp. 124-7. Whether this be true or not, few will fail to find a connexion between the wide meaning the apostle puts into the word "Church" in the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, and the imperial associations of the city from which he wrote. "Writing now from Rome, he (St. Paul) could not have divested himself, if he would, of a sense of writing from the centre of all earthly human affairs; all the more since we know from the narrative in Acts xxii. that he himself was a Roman citizen, and apparently proud to hold this place in the Empire. Here then he must have been vividly reminded of the already existing unity which comprehended both Jew and Gentile under the bond of subjection to the emperor at Rome, and similarity and contrast would alike suggest that a truer unity bound together in one society all believers in the crucified Lord." Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia*, p. 143.

¹ "Not in abstraction or isolation, but in communion lies the very meaning of personality itself," Moberly, *Ministerial Priesthood*, p. 5. "Fellowship is to the higher life what food is to the natural life—without it every power flags and at last perishes," Hort, *Hulsean Lectures*, p. 194.

tion. The unity of the Church of Christ is a primary verity of the Christian faith: "There is One Body, and One Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of all, Who is over all and through all and in all."¹ And because the Unity of the Church of Christ is a primary verity of the Christian faith, it can never be adequately represented in any outward polity, but must always be, in the first instance at least, a religious experience. Its source and centre can never be an earthly throne, but must always be that heavenly place where Jesus sits at the Right Hand of God.²

This enables us to see how the word "church" can be used, as it is in the New Testament, to denote communities of varying size, from the sum total of all the Christian communities on earth down to the tiny congregation which met in the house of Philemon. For the unity of the Christian Church is, in the first instance, the oneness of an ideal reality, and is not confined within the bounds of space and time as merely material entities are. It can be present in many places at the same time, and in such a way that, as Ignatius says, "Where Jesus Christ is, there is the *whole* Church."³ The congregation at Corinth was, in the eyes of St. Paul, the Body of Christ or the whole Church in its all-embracing unity—not *a* Body of Christ, for there is but one Body of Christ; not part of the Body of Christ, for Christ is not divided; but *the Body of Christ* in its unity and filled with the fulness of His powers.⁴ It is in this One Body, present in *every* Christian society, that our Lord has placed His

¹ Eph. iv. 4-6.

² This thought has been beautifully expressed by Dr. Sanday, *The Conception of Priesthood* (1898), pp. 11-14. ³ *To the Smyrnaeans*, 8.

⁴ Exegetes differ about the exact translation of 1 Cor. xii. 27: ἑμείς δὲ ἐστε σῶμα Χριστοῦ. A few (such as Godet) translate it: "a body of Christ"; by far the largest number translate: "the Body of Christ"; many "Christ's Body," leaving the exact thought indeterminate. It seems to me that the exact rendering, *a* or *the*, cannot be reached from purely grammatical reasoning. St. Paul is completing his metaphor or interpreting his parable. He has been emphasizing the fact that the

"gifts" or *charismata*, which enable the Church to perform its divine functions; and all the spiritual actions of the tiniest community, such as the Church in the house of Nymphas—Prayer, Praise, Preaching, Baptism, the Holy Supper—are actions of the whole Church of Christ.

The Christians of the early centuries clung to this thought, and we have a long series of writers, from Victor of Rome,¹ in the second century, down to Clement of Alexandria and Origen,² who tell us that the whole Church of the redeemed, with Christ and the angels, is present in the public worship of the individual congregation. The promise of the Master, that where two or three were gathered together in His Name there would He be in the midst of them, was placed side by side with the thought in the Epistle to the Hebrews that believers are surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses; and the combination suggested that in the simplest action of the smallest Christian fellowship there was the presence and the power of the whole Church of Christ. Tertullian pushes the thought to its furthest limits when he says in a well-known passage: "Accordingly, where there is no joint session of the ecclesiastical order, you Offer, Baptize, and are Priest alone for yourself; for where three are there the Church is, although they be laity."³

Christian community at Corinth is an organism with a variety of parts differing in structure and function. It is a perfect organism in the sense that there is no necessary part lacking that is required for the purpose the organism is intended, to serve for its support or increase or for work. The life which pervades the organism in its totality and in every minutest part is Christ (Col. iii. 14). The organism is *the* Body of Christ.

¹ "Esto potius : : : Christianus, pecuniam tuam adsidente Christo spectantibus angelis et martyris praesentibus super mensam dominicam sparge." *De Aleatoribus*, 11; Harnack und v. Gebhardt, *Texte u. Untersuchungen*, V. i. 29.

² Origen, *De Or.* 31:—"Καὶ ἀγγελικῶν δυνάμεων ἐφισταμένων τοῖς ἀθροίσμασι τῶν πιστευόντων καὶ αὐτοῦ τοῦ κυρίου καὶ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν δυνάμεως ἤδη δὲ καὶ πνευμάτων ἁγίων, οἶμαι δὲ, ὅτι καὶ προκεκοιμημένων σαφές δὲ, ὅτι καὶ ἐν τῷ βίῳ περιόντων, εἰ καὶ τὸ πῶς οὐκ εὐχερὲς εἶπείν."

³ Tertullian, *De exhortatione castitatis*, 7; compare *De poenitentia*, 10; *De pudicitia*, 21; *De fuga in persecutione*, 14.

3. The Church of our Lord's promise was to be a *visible community*. This note of visibility is suggested by the word *ecclesia* itself, and by the whole environment of its earliest Christian use.

The "congregation of Israel" and the "sovereign assembly" of the Greek city-state had been visible things. The time of the promise suggested a visible community. It came when the visible people of Israel had manifestly refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. His Church was set over against the Israel which had denied Him—one visible community against another. The earliest uses of the word *ecclesia* refer unmistakably to visible communities. When St. Paul persecuted the "Church of God," he made havoc of something more than an abstraction. He haled men and women to prison and confined real bodies within real stone walls. The churches spoken of in the Acts and in the Epistles were societies of men and women, living in families, coming together for public worship, and striving in spite of many infirmities to live the life of new obedience to which they had been called. They were little societies in the world, connected with it on all sides and yet not of it—lamps set on lamp-stands to enlighten the darkness of surrounding paganism. The "gifts" of the Spirit, which manifested the presence of Christ, were seen at work in the public assembly of the congregation, and were given to edify a visible society.

The two universal rites of the new society—Baptism and the Lord's Supper—show that it was a visible thing. St. Paul makes it clear that entrance into the Church was by the visible rite of Baptism, and that he himself had come into the Church by this door.¹ The Lord's Supper was a visible social institution, and could only occupy the place it did in a visible society.²

Even the Church Universal, which is described in the Epistle to the Ephesians, is a *visible* Church. It is an ideal reality; but an ideal Church is not invisible because it is ideal. It can be seen in any Christian community, great or small; seen in a

¹ Rom. vi, 3-8.; Gal. iii, 27.

² 2 Cor. xi, 23-27.

measure by the eye of sense, but more truly by the eye of faith. For it is one of the privileges of faith, when strengthened by hope and by love, to see the glorious ideal in the somewhat poor material reality. It was thus that St. Paul saw the universal Church of Christ made visible in the Christian community of Corinth.

St. Paul has described the Church in that great trading and manufacturing city of Corinth, where the rich were very rich and the poor were very poor; where the thoroughness of character, inherited from the early Roman colonists, had pushed the sensuous side of Greek civilization into all manner of excesses, until the city had become a by-word for foul living, and religion itself had become an incentive to lust.¹ This environment had tainted the Christian society. St. Paul saw it all and has described it. He has made us see the very Love-feasts, which introduced the Holy Supper, changed into banquets of display on the part of the rich, while the poor were swept into corners or compelled to wait till their wealthier brethren were served. He has shown us petty rivalries disguising themselves under the mask of faithfulness to eminent apostolic teachers. He has depicted the tainted morals of the city appearing unchecked within the Christian society. What a picture the heathen satirist Lucian, with his keen eye and his outspoken tongue, would have drawn of such a community! St. Paul saw all the frailty, the feebleness to resist the evil communications and the fickleness; and yet he saw in that community *the Body of Christ*. He needed the love that "beareth all things, that believeth all things, and that keepeth all things," to make his vision clear—and that is perhaps the reason why the wonderful chapter on Christian love comes in the middle of this epistle; but his vision was clear, and he saw the life there with its potency and promise. He could say to that Church *Ye are the Body of Christ*. He could see it, as he saw the Ephesian Church,

¹ Compare Dobschütz, *Die Urchristlichen Gemeinden, Sittengeschichtliche Bilder* (1902), pp. 18 ff.

becoming gradually rooted and grounded in love, gradually strengthened to apprehend with all saints the height, the depth, the length and the breadth of that love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and at last filled with all the fulness of God.

All things earthly have a double element, whether they be of good or evil report. They are in the present and they are making for the future. They are what they are to be. It is the same with all things belonging to Christianity on the human side. We *are* "sons of God," and yet we "*wait* for the adoption"; we *are* redeemed, and yet our redemption "*draweth nigh*." Those who "have been saved" are enjoined to "work out their own salvation." So it is with the Church of God. It is what it is to be.¹ And we are definitely taught by the very ways in which St. Paul uses the word "Church" to see the Church Universal in the individual Christian community.²

It will be admitted, however, that ideals are given us to be made manifest to the eye of sense as well as to the vision of faith, and that a duty is laid upon every Christian and upon every Christian society to make the universality of the Church of Christ which is manifest to faith plainly apparent to the eyes of sense. If the duty has been but scantily performed since the beginning of the third century, we may find that the neglect has come from abandoning apostolic methods in favour of others suggested by the great pagan empire of Rome. The duty of trying to make visible to the senses the inherent unity of the Church of Christ was always distinctly present to the mind of the great apostle to the Gentiles, and it may be useful to see how he set himself to the task.

One thing meets us at the outset. He would not for the sake

¹ Compare Robertson, *Regnum Dei*, p. 54:—"It (the kingdom of Christ) is the Kingdom of God in its idea—in potency and in promise: but visibly and openly not yet. This is St. Paul's well-known paradox of the Christian life. Our whole task as Christians is to become what we are."

² As in 1 Cor. x. 32; xi. 22; and xii. 28; compare above p. 11, note 2, § iv, 1.

of an external universality agree to anything which would set limits on the *real* universality of the Church of Christ. The preservation of the liberty with which Jesus had made His people free was of more importance in His eyes than the manifestation of the visibility of the universal fellowship of Christians with each other. Jewish believers were inclined to think that the practice of circumcision "embodied the principle of the historical continuity of the Church,"¹ and that no one who was outside the circle of the "circumcised," no matter how strong his faith nor how the fruits of the Spirit were manifest in his life and deeds, could plead the "security of the Divine Covenant." For this they could give reasons stronger than are brought forward by many who, in our own day, insist on different external "successions" as marks of catholicity. The Scripture had said: "My covenant shall be *in your flesh*, an *everlasting* covenant."² The Saviour Himself had been circumcised on the eighth day. He had never, in so many words, either publicly to the people or privately to His disciples, declared that circumcision was no longer to be the sign of the covenant of God.

St. Paul recognized that to limit "the security of the covenant" to something defined by what the Jews believed to be the "principle of the historical continuity of the Church," would be to destroy the real for a limited, though more sensibly visible, universality. He bent his whole energies to break down this false principle of continuity which placed the "succession" in something external, and not in the possession and transmission from generation to generation of the "gifts" of the Spirit within the community. This done, he used his administrative powers, and they were those of a statesman, to create

¹ The principle which underlies the claim generally associated with the ambiguous phrase "apostolic succession" is so curiously like the demand made by "those of the sect of the Pharisees who believed" in the days of St. Paul, that it can be most naturally expressed in the same language if only a "succession of bishops" takes the place of "circumcision."

² Gen. xvii, 13.

channels for the flow of the manifestation of the visible unity of the Church of Christ.

His ruling thought was to provide that all the various Christian communities should manifest their real brotherhood in the cultivation of the "fruits of the Spirit." The method of carving out a visibly universal Church by means of regulations affecting organization and external form is not without its attractions, which are irresistible to minds of the lawyer type and training, such as we see afterwards in Cyprian of Carthage. It seems a short and easy method of showing that the whole Church is visibly one. But it was not Paul's method. He seems to have thought as little about the special "construction of sheep-folds" as his Master. What concerned him was that the sheep should be gathered into one flock around the One Shepherd. He nowhere prescribed a universal ecclesiastical polity, still less did he teach that the universality of the Christian brotherhood must be made visible in this way. He regarded all the separate churches of Christ as independent self-governing societies. He strove to implant in all of them the principle of brotherly dealing with one another, and he dug channels in which the streams of the Spirit might flow in the practical manifestation of Christian fellowship.

Fellowship (*κοινωνία*), word and thought, is what filled his mind. All the brethren within one Church were to have fellowship with each other. The local churches within a definite region were to be in close fellowship. The churches among the Gentiles were to maintain brotherly relations with the Mother-Church in Jerusalem. What this fellowship primarily meant can be learnt from what the apostle says in Gal. ii. 9.¹ He tells us that the apostles to the Jews, and he the apostle to the Gentiles, gave each other the right hand of fellowship,

¹ Gal. ii. 9: "And when they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision."

because they recognized that they had a common faith in the same Christ. It was the recognition of a common belief in the One Christ, the knowledge that they all had within them a new faith which had revolutionised their lives, and was to express itself in their whole character and conduct, that made them feel the kinship with each other which was expressed in the common name "brethren." All down through the early centuries this idea that Christians form one brotherhood finds abundant expression. *Brotherhood* alternates with *Ecclesia* in the oldest sets of ecclesiastical canons,¹ while *omnis fraternitas* and *πᾶσα ἡ ἀδελφότης* are used to denote the whole of Christendom.²

The graceful deference which St. Paul always showed to the leaders in Jerusalem, who had been in Christ before himself; his anxieties about the welfare of the poor "saints" at Jerusalem, and his care to provide for their needs;³ the letters he asks to be read to all the members of the churches to which they are addressed, and sometimes to other churches also;⁴ the eagerness with which he communicates the fact that the church he is writing to enjoys a reputation for hospitality towards wayfaring brethren;⁵ the salutations his letters contain from one church to another,⁶ and from individual Christians to the churches;⁷ the messages sent by his assistants; his and their frequent journeyings from church to church—are all evidences of his unwearied efforts to make the universality of the Christian brotherhood widely manifest.

He did more. He grouped his churches in a statesmanlike

¹ See *Sources of the Apostolic Canons*, where *ἐκκλησία* appears in § 1 and *ἀδελφότης* in § 2; *Texte u. Untersuchungen*, II. v. 7. 12.

² For *universa fraternitas*, see the tract *De Aleatoribus*, 1; *Texte u. Untersuchungen*, V. i. 11; *omnis fraternitas*, V. i. 14; compare Tertullian, *Apologia*, 39; *De praescriptione*, 20; *De pudicitia*, 13. For *πᾶσα ἡ ἀδελφότης*, see 1 Clem. ii. 4; and Harnack's note on the passage; also 1 Peter ii. 17.

³ Acts xi. 30; cf. xii. 25.

⁴ Col. iv. 16; where St. Paul asks that his letter be read to the Church of Laodicea.

⁵ 1 Thess. iv. 9-11; ⁶ Rom. xvi. 16; 1 Cor. xvi. 19.

⁷ Rom. xvi. 21-23; 1 Cor. xvi. 19; Gal. i. 2; Phil. iv. 21, 22; Col. i. 1, 2.

way so that each could support the others. His statesmanship discerned the advantages which the imperial system, with its trade routes, its postal arrangements and its provincial capitals, gave not merely for the propagation of the Gospel, but for the fellowship of the churches. Corinth was the centre for the churches of Achaia, and the second Epistle to the Corinthians is addressed to all the Christians within that important Roman province.¹ Round Ephesus² were grouped the churches of Asia—Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, with Troas and others on the coast, and Colossae and Hierapolis in the Lycus valley.³ The churches of Macedonia were, in all probability, grouped round Thessalonica,⁴ and those of Galatia formed another group, although we are not told what the centre was.⁵

While engaged in giving visibility to the unity of the churches he had planted St. Paul was never unmindful that he wished also to see them united visibly with the churches of Jerusalem and Judea. He had started with the thought of a visible fellowship between Jew and Gentile, and the union which was symbolised when Barnabas and he gave and received the right hand of fellowship with Peter, James and John, was never far from his thoughts. He thought of One Church of Christ which embraced Jew and Gentile all the world over.⁶

But perhaps the evidence of the apostle's method of implanting a sense of a visible unity within the Church of Christ is best seen in the methods, plan and motive of the great collection for the saints at Jerusalem, which fills so large a place in his epistles.

This great collection was no mere spontaneous outburst of Christian charity like the previous succours sent to the poor of Jerusalem. It was a carefully-planned attempt to unite a host of independent churches, which represented wide areas,

¹ 2 Cor. i. 1. ² 1 Cor. xvi. 19; Acts xix. 10.

³ Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, p. 274. ⁴ 1 Thess. iv. 10.

⁵ 1 Cor. xvi. 1. ⁶ 1 Cor. x. 32; xii. 13; Rom. iii. 29.

in co-operative brotherly action. The preparations occupied more than a year's time. The principle of representation was introduced. Each group of contributing churches sent deputies, all of whom joined the apostle at different places and at different dates, and accompanied him to Jerusalem, bearing with them the money collected. The anxiety which the apostle displayed in the careful arrangement of all the details; the patience with which he awaited the complete mustering of the delegates on the road; the determination that nothing should prevent him from accompanying the delegates to Jerusalem—not even prophetic warnings of danger nor the hindrance of cherished plans to visit Rome—all combine to show that he regarded it as the fulfilment of long cherished plans for making visible the fellowship of all believers in the way that best commended itself to his mind.¹

It may be that the success of this mustering of his mission churches, this triumphant experiment of co-operation and representation, combined with the assurance that Jew and Gentile were at last dwelling harmoniously within the One Household of God, kindled the thoughts which find expression in the epistles of his Roman captivity. The unity of the wide-spreading Church of Christ was at last made visible to the eyes of sense, not by uniformity of external polity, but by the manifestation of brotherly love. The actual unity of all believers was conspicuous in this great fruit of the Spirit of Christ.

If we follow the accounts given us in the *Acts*, the tests of what was required for visible fellowship by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem did not differ greatly from those demanded by St. Paul. It seemed to be their custom when they heard of some new and unexpected appearance of faith in Jesus to send down

¹ Rendall, *The Pauline Collection for the Saints*, *Expositor*, Nov. 1893, For St. Paul's conception of what was meant by "fellowship" and the methods he took to make it visible, see Weizsäcker, *The Apostolic Age of the Christian Church* (Eng. Trans.) I. p. 46 ff.; II. pp. 307-9; and Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller*, pp. 54, 130 ff.

some one to inquire about it. Peter and John were sent to Samaria to inquire into the conversions among the Samaritans made by the preaching of Philip.¹ Barnabas was sent down to Antioch on a similar errand.² The tests applied in both cases seem to have been: Are there any manifestations of the fruits of the Spirit in the lives of the new converts? The case of Antioch is most instructive. The Gospel had been proclaimed there, we know not how or by whom. The apostles at Jerusalem seem to have had nothing to do with the proclamation. An infant church had come into being without their guidance or assistance. Its birth is unrecorded; its earliest history unknown; the congregation is in being before the apostles seem to have heard of it. When the delegate from Jerusalem appeared and made his inquiries, what satisfied him was that the grace of God was manifestly with the brethren there. The believers in Antioch and the delegate from Jerusalem had the same faith in the same Saviour, and their faith found its proper outcome in a renewed life. That was enough for fellowship or visible and fraternal union. We see no attempt to impose any external ecclesiastical ordinances, no suggestions about the need for showing themselves to be in the line of the "historic continuity of the church" by accepting circumcision or otherwise. Whether we take the reception of Cornelius, the welcome accorded to the Samaritan converts, or the joy of Barnabas when he perceived that the grace of God was manifest in Antioch, the unity of the Christian Church was made visible to the eyes of sense, not by uniformity of organization, but by the manifestation of the fruits of the Spirit; that was the one feature that was regarded as proof that it was worthy of being received into the common fellowship.

IV. To this *visible society* belongs *Authority*. The very thought of a Christian Church visible suggests the idea of a separate community with a distinct sphere of religious life; and this in turn implies that the society must have, like every form of cor-

¹ Acts viii, 14-27,

² Acts xi, 22, 23,

porate social existence, powers of oversight and discipline to be exercised upon its members. But the authority which the Church possesses is altogether different from what a voluntary association of men may exercise upon its members, and of another kind from what is possessed by lawful civil government. The authority comes from Christ Himself. The Christian Democracy is also a Theocracy; it combines the two ideas of rule associated with the Greek and the Hebrew uses of the word "ecclesia." While the authority belongs to the whole membership, and is therefore democratic; it nevertheless comes from *above*, and is therefore theocratic.¹ It comes from Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the Church.²

Our Lord has intimated that He has imparted this authority to His Church in many recorded sayings, and in particular in three well-known passages: in Matt. xvi. 13-19; Matt. xviii. 15-20, and in John xx. 21-23.

The first promise was made to St. Peter in very special circumstances. Our Lord had asked a question of all His disciples. St. Peter, answering impetuously in their name, made himself their representative. His answer was an adoring confession of his faith in the Person of Christ³—a confession which contained in germ all the future confessions of the Church of Christ, and which made him the spokesman for the mighty multitude which

¹ Some Anglican divines make strange deductions from the truth that the authority which belongs to the Church comes from *above*. They at once infer that inasmuch as the authority comes from above it cannot come directly to the whole Christian society; but must come through an official class of ministers who act as a species of *plastic medium* between our Lord and His people. Strange how Gnostic and Arian ideas banished from the creeds of the Church linger in thoughts about Orders! Then by a confusion of ideas they transfer the phrase "from above" to the human sphere, and make it an essential idea of legitimate ecclesiastical rule that it must be invariably communicated from a higher to a lower order of ministry! Why should authority imparted through the Christian Society be regarded as "from beneath," as of the earth earthy?

² Ephes. v. 23; Col. i. 18.

³ "There is a tone of loving reverence and worship in the words 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' They answer to our Lord's

no man can number, who were to make the same confession of adoring trust in their Saviour. The confession was an inspired one; it had been revealed to St. Peter by the Father; there was divinity in it, for God gave the revelation which prompted the confession; and there was humanity in it, for the man appropriated and made his own what the Father had revealed to him. It was the first of what was to become a multitudinous sea of voices of men inspired by the Father to know and to confess that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the Living God. It was to the Peter who answered as representing the Twelve, to Peter who was the spokesman for countless thousands of the faithful who down through the march of Time would make the same glad confession, that the promise was given.

The promise was of authority to bear the key of the household of the faithful, to have the power to let in and keep out from the household. The words and metaphor used were the familiar Jewish terms to denote a delegated authority. The thought conveyed is commonly and correctly explained by a reference to the substitution of Shebna for Eliakim in the stewardship of the House of David;¹ and it is implied that our Lord, in the word He used, made St. Peter, and those he represented, stewards of the Household of the faithful with the authority to "bind" and to "loose," to "prohibit" and to "permit," to "admit" and "exclude." Other passages in the New Testament, making use of the same simile of the major-domo with his key and his power of letting in or locking out, assist us to see the fuller meaning of the promise recorded. The one is a warning and the other

picture of the spiritual experience of His disciples in His great intercessory prayer; 'I manifested Thy name unto the men whom Thou gavest Me out of the world; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them to Me; and they have kept Thy word. Now they know that all things, whatsoever Thou hast given Me, are from Thee; for the words which Thou gavest Me, I have given unto them; and they received them, and knew of a truth that I came forth from Thee, and they believed that Thou didst send Me.' Bannerman, *The Scripture Doctrine of the Church*, p. 169.

¹ Isaiah xxii. 20, 22. Compare Gore, *The Church and the Ministry*, p. 223.

an encouragement. Our Lord called the attention of his followers to the scribes and Pharisees, who "sat in Moses' seat," and had to be obeyed. They had the keys and they used them to shut the door of the kingdom of heaven against men.¹ Jesus pronounces woe on them for using the keys in this way. Their shutting out, although they have the keys officially, was evidently not ratified in heaven. Hence we must infer that the mere official position of being the bearer of the "keys" does not always ensure that what is done on earth by the bearer will be ratified in heaven. Then in the message to the Church in Philadelphia, the brethren there were told that the real bearer of the "keys" is the Lord Himself.² It is only when He lets in that there can be no exclusion; it is only when He shuts out that there is any real exclusion. A real authority is bestowed, and real powers are given; but just as Peter's confession depended on the inspiration of the Father, so the ratification of the exercise of power depends on its Christ-like use.

It is doubtful whether the second saying was addressed to the Twelve, or to a larger group of disciples, but the advice which precedes the promise is to be applied and can only be applied to all the followers of Jesus within a community. It gives directions for dealing with offences and offenders within the Christian society, and has been commonly regarded as the Scriptural warrant for the exercise of discipline within the Church. It proceeds on the idea that offences may arise from thoughtlessness as well as from wilful sin, and that the offender, in spite of his offence, is a brother to be won back to brotherliness. It prescribes a threefold attempt to win back the erring brother to a state of brotherly feeling. If everything fails, if the offender has refused to hear the offended person pleading with him in his own person, if he has rejected the remonstrances of two or

¹ Matt. xxiii. 2, 3, 13:—ὅτι κλείετε τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν οὐρανῶν ἔμπροσθεν τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

² Rev. iii. 7:—τάδε λέγει ὁ ἄγιος, ὁ ἀληθινός, ὁ ἔχων τὴν κλεῖν Δαβὶδ, ὁ ἀνοίγων καὶ οὐδεὶς κλείσει, καὶ κλείων καὶ οὐδεὶς ἀνοίγει.

three fellow-Christians pleading with him, if he finally spurns the warnings of the Church or whole Christian society, then, and not till then, does the thought of punishment enter. The punishment, if punishment it can be called, is expulsion of a certain kind from the Christian communion. The offender is to be treated as the Jewish Synagogue acted towards a Gentile or a publican. He was to be looked on as if he had never belonged to the society, or as if he had voluntarily excluded himself by the course of life he had chosen to persist in.

We are told that the decisions of the Church on earth in such cases as those described will be ratified in Heaven. This is a confirmation of the promise given to St. Peter, and like it is strictly conditional. The condition attached is that there must be a real and living communion between the Church and its Head the Lord Jesus Christ, so that the Church decides in a Christ-like spirit. It is impossible to separate the promise from the verses which immediately follow. Our Lord Himself joins them together by very solemn words. This condition does not render the promise of ratification deceptive. The fellowship with Christ, which is the condition, is to be had provided it is sought for earnestly, honestly and trustingly in prayer (v. 19).

The authority is given to the society of believers, whether two or three meeting together in a place far from any others, or a great and organised community. It is not entrusted by our Lord directly to any official class; it is not given to any human power not rising out of the company of the faithful. It is given to the visible fellowship, and it belongs to them in reality, as well as in name, in the measure in which they have living communion with Him Who is their Head.

The third promise seems to have been made to the nucleus of the infant Church in Jerusalem, if we are to accept Luke xxiv. 33 ff. as the parallel passage—to “the disciples and those who were with them.” It is commonly held to include all that is bestowed in the other two, and perhaps something even more solemn—the power to pronounce the divine sentence of pardon

involved in the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ. Whatever be the powers granted, they are given to the whole company of believers and not to any class among them. They are also, as in the earlier passages, given under conditions. The power can only manifest itself in those who are filled with the Spirit of Christ.¹ In virtue of this promise with its gift of power the visible Church of Christ can with absolute confidence declare the gospel of pardon through the work of Christ, and can assert that the divine conditions are those which it proclaims. In virtue of the same promise every individual Christian is entitled to affirm with absolute certainty to every penitent sinner that God pardons his sins if he accepts Jesus as his All-sufficient Saviour.²

The authority was given in the first passage to one man; in the second probably to the Twelve; in the third to the whole Christian community. In each case the more particular is absorbed in the more general. The power given to St. Peter

¹ John xx. 22, 23 :—καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐνεφύσησεν καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς, Λάβετε Πνεῦμα Ἅγιον ἃν τινων ἀφῆτε τὰς ἁμαρτίας, ἀφίενται (ἀφίενται Ti., W. H.) αὐτοῖς ἃν τινων κρατῆτε, κεκράτηνται.

² “The main thought which the words convey is that of the reality of the power of absolution from sin granted to the Church and not of the particular organization through which the power is administered. There is nothing in the context to show that the gift was confined to any particular group (as the apostles) among the whole company present. The commission must therefore be regarded as properly the commission of the Christian society, and not as that of the Christian ministry (cf. Matt. v. 13, 14). The great mystery of the world, absolutely insoluble by thought, is that of sin; the mission of Christ was to bring salvation from sin; and the work of the Church is to apply to all that which He has gained. Christ risen was Himself the sign of the completed overthrow of death, the end of sin, and the impartment of His life necessarily carried with it the fruit of His conquest. Thus the promise is in one sense an interpretation of the gift. The gift of the Holy Spirit finds its application in the communication or withholding of the powers of the new life. : : : The promise, as being made not to one but to the Society, carries with it of necessity : : : the character of perpetuity: the society never dies. : : : The exercise of the power must be placed in the closest connexion with the faculty of spiritual discernment, consequent on the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Westcott, *Gospel of St. John*, p. 295.

in the first passage is merged in the authority given to the Twelve in the second; and the authority given to the Twelve is in turn merged in the authority given to the whole congregation. St. Peter received the power because he represented the Twelve directly, and the whole Church founded on him and on his confession indirectly. The Twelve received it because they represented the Church which was to come into existence through their ministry. After the Resurrection the whole infant Church received the same, if not greater, authority. St. Peter was to die; the Twelve also were to go the way of all flesh; but the society was to remain, and with it the authority bestowed upon it by its Lord.

It is needless to say that very varying interpretations of these three passages have been given by different schools of theologians; that Romanists found on the promise given to St. Peter, and that some Anglicans insist that the third promise was made to the Eleven only, even if the company included other disciples, and build up the edifice of Apostolic Succession on this narrow foundation; and that both affirm that the authority which our Lord gave to His Church was placed directly in the hands of office-bearers, and not in those of the whole membership.

To examine at length the various exegetical arguments brought forward in support of these positions would lead far beyond the space at our disposal; but two general considerations may be adduced. Such an interpretation seems to be against the analogy of our Lord's teaching; and He was not so understood by His New Testament Church.

While our Lord chose Twelve to form an inner circle of disciples, while He trained them by close companionship with Himself for special service, while He weaned them in half-conscious ways from their old life, it nowhere appears that He bestowed upon them a special rank or instituted a peculiar or exceptional office of stewardship of divine mysteries in their persons.¹ It

¹ Cf. 1 Peter iv. 10: "According as *each* hath received a gift, ministering it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

is improbable that He bestowed on them the name *apostles* to be a general and distinguishing title, and one unshared in by other disciples besides the Twelve. Our Lord called them *apostles* when He sent them on a special mission among the villages; they were apostles while this mission lasted; when it came to an end they were the Twelve or inner circle of intimates of the Master.¹ After the Death and Resurrection of the Lord the task to which they had been trained by companionship with the Saviour and in the apprentice mission among the villages, became their life work, but it was shared in from the very beginning by others who bore with them the common name apostle.² Nor does our Lord make any promises to the Twelve which imply that He had bestowed upon them a special rank in the Church which was to come. He told them that whoever received them received Him; but this was a privilege shared in by the least of His followers, for whoever received a little child in His name received Him.³ It is impossible to avoid noticing how the ancient manuals of church organization have caught the spirit of Christ's teaching, that there are to be no lordships in His Church. The qualifications set forth for office

¹ The relations of the Twelve to the Church of Christ are strikingly brought out by Dr. Hort in his *Christian Ecclesia*, pp. 23-41. On the title *apostle* he says: "Taking these facts together respecting the usage of the Gospels, we are led, I think, to the conclusion that in its original sense the term Apostle was not intended to describe the habitual relation of the Twelve to our Lord during the days of His ministry, but strictly speaking only that mission among the villages, of which the beginning and the end are recorded for us." . . . "If they (the Twelve) represented an apostolic order within the Ecclesia then the Holy Communion must have been intended only for members of that order, and the rest of the Ecclesia had no part in it. But if, as the men of the apostolic age and subsequent ages believed without hesitation, the Holy Communion was meant for the Ecclesia at large, then the Twelve sat down that evening as representatives of the Ecclesia at large; they were disciples more than they were apostles."

² St. Paul in his account of the appearances of our Lord after His Resurrection distinguishes between the Twelve and apostles; 1 Cor. xv. 5-8; cf. below, pp. 74-85.

³ Matt. x, 40; cf. Luke x, 16; Matt. xviii, 5; Mark ix, 37; Luke ix, 48.

are those which every Christian ought to possess; and the duties said to belong to office are those which for the most part all Christians ought to perform. We do not see *orders* in the sense of ecclesiastical rank whose authority does not come from the people; we see ecclesiastical *order* and arrangement of service. Whatever power and authority the Church of Christ possesses in gift from the Lord resides in the membership of the Church and not in any superior rank of officials who have received an authority over the Church directly from Christ Himself.

The Church of the New Testament evidently interpreted the words of our Lord to mean that He placed the authority which He had bestowed upon His Church in the hands of the membership, of the community which formed the local church.

Even in the Primitive Church in Jerusalem, where the presence of an apostle was seldom lacking, the community was self-governing, and acted on the conviction that the authority bestowed by Christ on His Church belonged to the whole congregation of the faithful and not to an apostolic hierarchy. The assembly of the local church appointed delegates and elected office-bearers. The vice-apostle Matthias and the Seven were elected by the assembly,¹ and a similar assembly appointed Barnabas to be its delegate to Antioch.² The assembly of the local church summoned even apostles before it, and passed judgment upon their conduct.³ The apostles might suggest, but the congregation ruled.

When we pass from the Church at Jerusalem to the churches planted by the ministry of St. Paul, the proofs of democratic self-government are still more abundant. When the apostle urges the duty of stricter discipline, or when he recommends

¹ Acts i. 23; vi. 5.

² Acts xi. 22.

³ On the conduct of St. Peter at Caesarea, Acts xi. 1-4; on the opinions and practices of St. Paul, xv. 12, 22-29, and whatever differences may be found in the account of the proceedings in this chapter and in St. Paul's statement in the Epistle to the Galatians (Gal. ii. 1 ff.) there is no question that both recognize the supremacy of the assembly of the Church.

a merciful treatment of one who had lapsed, he writes to the whole community in whose hands the authority resides. He pictures himself in their midst while they are engaged in this painful duty. He assures them that they have the authority of the Lord for the exercise of discipline. For however thoroughly democratic the government of the New Testament Church was, it was still as thoroughly theocratic. The presence of the Lord Himself was with them in the exercise of the authority He had entrusted to their charge.¹ The evidence of the presence of Christ was of the same kind as witnessed His presence in the actions of public worship. The local churches recognised His presence in the manifestation of the "gifts" of His Spirit bestowed upon them. These "gifts" included not only the bestowal of grace needed for exhortation to edification, but also the wisdom to "govern" and to "guide." The theocratic element was not given in a hierarchy imposed upon the Church from without; it manifested itself within the community. It appeared in the presence, recognition and use made of gifts of government bestowed upon its membership which were none the less spiritual, divine and "from above," because they concerned the ordinary duties of oversight and manifested themselves in the natural endowments of members of the community. The presence of Christ among His people may be as easily manifested in the decision which the assembly of the local church arrives at by a majority² of votes as in the fiat launched from an episcopal chair. The latter is not necessarily from above, and the former is not of necessity from beneath.

V. Lastly, the Church of Christ is a *sacerdotal* society.

The Church of Christ is continually represented as the "ideal Israel." This is a favourite thought of St. Paul's, and it implies that the special function of the Church of Christ is to do in a

¹ 1 Cor. v. 3-5; Gal. vi. 1.

² The censure inflicted on the member of the Corinthian Church who had disobeyed the Apostle Paul was carried by a majority: 2 Cor. ii. 6, ἡ ἐπιτιμία αὐτῇ ἢ ὑπὸ τῶν πλειόνων.

better manner what the ancient Israel did imperfectly. When we ask what the special function of the ancient Israel was, we find it given in a great variety of ways, all of which include one central thought, best expressed perhaps by the phrase, "To approach God." This central idea was connected with the thoughts of special times of approach, or Holy Seasons; with a special place of approach, which was the Temple of God's Presence; and with a special set of men who made the approach on behalf of their fellows, and who were called Priests. When we turn to the Church of Christ we find the same central thought and the same dependent ideas. The main function of the New Testament Church is also to approach God. Just as in the Old Testament economy the priests when approaching God presented sacrifices to Him, so in the New Testament Church gifts are to be presented to God, and these gifts or offerings bear the Old Testament name of sacrifices. We are enjoined to present *our bodies*; ¹ *our praise*, "that is the fruit of our lips which make confession to His name"; ² *our faith*; ³ *our almsgiving*; ⁴ our "doing good and communicating." ⁵ These are all called "sacrifices," or "sacrifices well-pleasing to God," and, to distinguish them from the offerings of the Old Testament economy, "spiritual or living sacrifices." ⁶ The exertions made by St. Paul to bring the heathen to a knowledge of the Saviour is also called a sacrifice or offering. ⁷ The New Testament Church is the ideal Israel, and does the work which the ancient

¹ Rom. xii. 1: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, well-pleasing to God, which is your reasonable service (τὴν λογικὴν λατρείαν ὑμῶν)." The thought expressed is that the Christian should consecrate the whole personality, body, soul and spirit to God; and thus all service whether of work or worship became a sacrifice. Compare Ps. li. 15-17.

² Heb. xiii. 15. ³ Phil. ii. 17.

⁴ Paul's great collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem is an offering: Acts xxiv. 17; so is the contributions which the members of the Church at Philippi sent to the apostle: Phil. iv. 18. ⁵ Heb. xiii. 16.

⁶ Θυσίαι πνευματικαί: 1 Pet. ii. 5; θυσία ζωῆς: Rom. xii. 1; cf. Phil. ii. 17; ⁷ Rom. xv. 16.

Israel was appointed to do. The limitations only have disappeared. There is no trace in the New Testament Church of any specially holy places or times or persons. The Christian ideal is, to quote the late Dr. Lightfoot, a Holy Season extending all the year round, a Temple confined only by the limits of the habitable globe, and a Priesthood including every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. ¹

This does not mean that the New Testament Church may not select special days for the public worship of God; that it may not dedicate buildings where the faithful can meet together to unite in offering the sacrifices of prayer and praise; that it may not set apart men from among its membership and appoint them to lead its devotions. But it does mean that God can be approached at all times, and in every place, and by every one among His people. His fellow believers may select one from among themselves to be their *minister*. There may be a *ministering priesthood*, but there cannot be a *mediating priesthood* within the Christian society. There is one Mediator only, and all, men, women and children, have the promise of immediate entrance into the presence of God, and are priests.

Luther has expressed the thought of the sacerdotal character of the Church of Christ when he says, in a description of the Eucharistic service: "There our priest or minister stands before the altar, having been publicly called to his priestly function; he repeats publicly and distinctly Christ's words of the Institution; he takes the Bread and the Wine, and distributes it according to Christ's words; and we all kneel beside him and around him, men and women, young and old, master and servant, mistress and maid, all holy priests together, sanctified by the blood of Christ. We are there in our priestly dignity. . . . We do not let the priest proclaim for himself the ordinance of Christ; but he is the mouthpiece of us all, and we all say it with him in our hearts with true faith in the Lamb of God Who feeds us with His Body and Blood."

¹ *Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (1881), 6th ed. p. 183.

This sacerdotal character of the whole Church of Christ was maintained in the primitive Christian Church down to at least the middle of the third century. Whatever evinced a whole-hearted dedication of one's self to God was a sacrifice which required no mediating priesthood in the offering. For the Christian sacrifice always means a sacrifice of self. When Polycarp gave his body to be burnt for the faith of Jesus, he gave it in sacrifice, and every martyr's death or suffering was a sacrifice well-pleasing to God.¹ When poor and humble believers fasted that they might have food to give to the hungry, they were sacrificing a spiritual sacrifice.² When Christians, either at home and in private or in the assembly for public worship, poured forth prayers and thanksgivings, they were offering sacrifice to God.³ Justin Martyr does not hesitate to call such devotions "the only perfect and well-pleasing sacrifices to God."⁴

And the Holy Supper, the very apex and crown of all Christian

¹ Compare *Letter of the Smyrnaeans on the Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 14: "Then he, placing his arms behind him and being bound to the stake, like a goodly ram out of a great flock for an offering, a burnt sacrifice made ready and acceptable to God, looking up to heaven, said: O Lord God Almighty. . . ."

² Aristides, *Apology*, 15: "And if any among the Christians is poor and in want, and they have not overmuch of the means of life, they fast two or three days, in order that they may provide those in need with the food they require."

A favourite phrase to describe widows and orphans was "the altar of God" on which the sacrifices of almsgiving were offered up. It is used by Polycarp, *To the Philippians*, 4; also in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, ii. 26 and iv. 3, of the orphans, the old and all who were supported by the benevolence of the faithful. Tertullian says of the widow: "aram enim Dei mundam proponi oportet," *Ad Uxor.* i. 7.

³ Clement of Alexandria spiritualizes the Old Testament sacrifices to make them the forerunners of Christian prayers. "And that compounded incense which is mentioned in the Law, is that which consists of many tongues and voices in prayer: . . . brought together in praises with a pure mind, and just and right conduct, from holy works and righteous prayer," *Strom.* vii. 6. In the same chapter he says: "For the sacrifice of the Church is the word breathing as incense from holy souls, the sacrifice and the whole mind being at the same time unveiled to God."

⁴ *Dialogue*, 117.

public worship, where Christ gives Himself to His people, and where His people dedicate themselves to Him in body, soul and spirit, was always a sacrifice as prayers, praises and almsgiving were. The Church of Christ was a sacerdotal society, its members were all priests, and its services were all sacrifices.¹

Such is the New Testament thought of the Church of Christ—a Fellowship, a United Fellowship, a Visible Fellowship, a Fellowship with an Authority bestowed upon it by its Lord, and a sacerdotal Fellowship whose every member has the right of direct access to the throne of God, bringing with him the sacrifices of himself, of his praise and of his confession.

¹ The conception of a mutilated sacerdotalism, where one part of the Christian worship is alone thought of as the true sacrifice, and a small portion of the fellowship—the ministry—is declared to be the priesthood, did not appear until the time of Cyprian, and was his invention.