

VII. *The Church.*

We believe that the Church, the society of the redeemed, was brought into existence by God Himself through the work and risen power of Christ, Who in calling men into fellowship with Himself calls them by the same act into fellowship with one another in Him.

We believe that the Church is the organ of Christ's mind and redemptive will, the body of which He is the Head. Under Him the Church is called to the proclamation of the everlasting Gospel with its offer of salvation, to the worship of God, Creator and Redeemer, to the loving service of mankind, and to the care and nurture of the flock.

We believe that all members of the Church are one in Him, and that the life of the Church in every age is continuous with that of the first apostolic company. The groups commonly known as "churches" are called to share in the life of the whole Church, of all ages and of all lands, entering freely into the full heritage of thought, worship, and discipline, and living together in mutual confidence.

We believe that for the fulfilment of her mission in the world God has given to the Church the Ministry, the Scriptures and the Sacraments.

So we acknowledge one holy, catholic, apostolic Church, the Body of Christ, the household and family of God.

CHAPTER VII. THE CHURCH

The First Apostolic Company.

"And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles" (Luke 6: 12-13).

When Jesus thus called to His side twelve men to share His thought and His destiny, He was foreshadowing the Christian Church. And the circumstances attending that decision are enlightening. (1) The group arose in answer to worldly hostility that was hardening into bitter hate: "And they were filled with madness; and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus" (Luke 6: 11). Following the will of the Father who is Love, Jesus had put human need above venerable tradition, and so had aroused that unreasoning opposition that only a long process of patient testimony could hope to undermine. (2) That call of the Twelve moreover was no snap decision, no petulant counter-thrust. All night long He had wrestled on the mountain top, seeking to assure Himself that this creative act was the will of God. That association that was to take final shape as the Christian Church issues from the counsel of the All-wise God. Jesus would fain have worked with the established orders of the day, using the synagogue and the Pharisee as His instruments in the forwarding of truth; He would rather have expressed His mind within the forms and institutions of Judaism. But superstitious fear and professional jealousy had banged and bolted the door against Him, and He could none other than form His own society of friends. (3) The men He chose to share His high enterprise in living were simple unlettered men from the fishing grounds and the customs office, pessimists like Thomas and ardent men of action like Zelotes, ordinary men of varied moods and classes; for His way of life was a vain offering to the world if it could not capture and hold and sanctify the common folk of every rank and condition. (4) Moreover the place for Christ's people is right in the midst of needy humanity: "And he came down

with them, and stood in the plain," and immediately it was in a great concourse of folk "out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon" (Luke 6: 17) that the first contact of the incipient Church was made—contact that offered the Word of God with healing and release. And that contact must never be lost though the world may strive to break away. "Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil" (Luke 6: 22). Not that there is any merit in thus being cut off from the community and detested; it must be for an end—for the Son of Man's sake. The task of the Church is to be one of persistence in well-doing. Love, give, judge not: such are the imperatives that chart the course of the future for this new community. But these heights of living can be scaled only if the highest draw us heavenward: "Be ye merciful, as your Father also is merciful" (Luke 6: 36).

God Who at Sundry Times. Ex. 19: 3-6; 1 Pet. 2: 9; Rev. 1: 6.

This movement that Jesus had initiated was not altogether new: it was but a continuation of an urgent demand that the Spirit of God had ever been pressing upon the human sphere. God had never left Himself without a witness: always in the souls of men there had been an awareness of a divine invasion, the pressure of a Presence that would not be denied. The Eternal Creator had never ceased to separate for Himself a people: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth," said the Word to Amos (3: 2). The people of Israel, conscious of an act of great deliverance, had made covenant at Mount Sinai, acknowledging the hand that had been stretched out to free them from oppression and absorption in Egypt, and in the Ten Words and in the call to life as a free people they had recognized One who was disclosing Himself and claiming them as His own by virtue of His mighty Act and righteous Will. Surrounding peoples might stand on the same or higher levels of culture, they might enjoy broader lands and vaster power and riches, and be raised to dizzy heights in the changing landscapes of history and experience; but because at the heart of her social structure there were ever those who kept tryst with the Eternal Justice, Israel the people was different. Other folk were like beasts of the

jungle threading the forests in search of prey and, having found repletion, returning again to their lairs, circling eternally in the semi-darkness of the woods; but the Hebrew, fascinated by the music of the waters, kept pursuing them through bog and marsh to clear stream and open country, and kept ever marching on under open skies to the sea. It was the pilgrimage of faith that Abraham began when he went out not knowing whither he went, but, because he was divinely led, seeking a city whose builder and maker is God.

By the Saving Remnant. Is. 1: 9; Is. 8: 16-18; Is. 10: 20-23; Is. 2: 2-5; Is. 9: 5-7.

Not all of Israel were faithful. Rather the temptations and allurements of the encircling world made graves for the many, and only the few kept pushing on in the spirit of the true pioneers. The forward march of Israel was possible only by the saving of the elect remnant: "Except the Lord had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Is. 1: 9). Men's sluggard hearts grow fat, their ears are dull, their eyes drop shut: they will not change their ways and turn towards God to be healed (Is. 6: 9-10). But the prophet does not lapse into the lethargy of the majority. He sees in the stupidity of the many the challenge to the faithfulness of the few who face and acknowledge moral facts. What Winston Churchill said of the work of the Royal Air Force over Britain in 1940 might be said of Isaiah and his remnant.

The assembling of this spiritual band marks an epoch in human history. The prophet rightly saw in his God-given insights teaching to be sealed and guarded as a treasure in the keeping of his disciples. This minority, Isaiah taught, must learn to await the Lord who is hiding His face: they must regard themselves as hostages of the Spirit, signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord of Hosts who keeps watch above His own in Mount Zion (8: 16-18). While the masses may not know or consider, the elect must face the facts of life with unflinching eyes. They will mark and share the divine sadness over the vineyard of Israel that brings forth wild grapes. Their Saviour God "looked for justice, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." They

will share the dream of a day when men shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks (2: 4), and when the blood-stained war-cloak shall be food for the fire. But well they know this wished for spring time will issue from no war-weariness or parley of peoples: it starts from a fresh miracle of grace: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: . . . and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace" (9: 6). The remnant had the sustaining confidence that God had His hand upon the world and the shape of history, and He was yet to manifest Himself anew in the advent of Immanuel.

The prophet rebukes scornfully mere temple-treading, and appears to hold his society together by no institutional bonds, but relies only on an inner loyalty to the divine Spirit. Yet the source of all his inspiration is a vision that comes to him in the Temple, in the shrine which had for so long proved itself as the spiritual home of his fathers (6: 1-12). It was in the midst of worship, in the seeking of the Divine Presence, that the call came to him. And there too came the assurance upon which he based his community: though the judgments of history may see the oak tree of Israel shattered and prostrate, yet the broken stump may sprout again; the vital tenth within the nation may win it a new lease of life (6: 13). And again that call came to him because his heart's concern was deep planted in the politics of his time: it was in the year that King Uzziah died that he sought and heard the Divine voice. Neither prophet nor divine community could function except in so far as they were rooted deep in the nation's life and interests.

And in Divers Manners. Jer. 31: 31-34; Dan. 7; Is. 42: 1-4, etc.

The idea of a spiritual core within the nation that will save the whole found expression again and again, notably in Jeremiah, in the Suffering Servant songs, and in Daniel.

Jeremiah (31: 31) pictured a new covenant that God would make with His people marked by three notes: *inwardness*, "I will put my law in their inward parts"; *individualism*, "they shall all know me"; and *forgiveness*, "their sins I will remember no more" (31: 33f.). It brings a new and closer fellowship with God. And it is all His gracious doing; for it is the act of forgiveness

that floods mind and conscience with a new knowledge of the Divine nature and inspires a grateful eagerness to do His will. Thus the prophet strikes a new note in insisting that what makes a man a member of the community is the direct action of God on each individual, a forgiving act that awakens each soul within. And Jeremiah was here indulging in no mere spinning of fancy, but applying in the large what had been his own experience. Caught in the gruelling disasters of the Exile and faced by what seemed the dissolution and cruel wrecking of his beloved nation, he himself had reached out and found a God who chose the darkness in which to draw nearer.

The poet of the Suffering Servant songs (Is. 42: 1-4; 49: 1-6; 50: 4-9; 52: 13 to 53: 12) extended his vision beyond Israel to other nations. Brooding on the inexplicably heavy suffering of his people, he breaks out into a new conception. It is not for their own sins but for the sins of others that the holy people are suffering: they must be vicariously bearing the sins of the world. But therein is a divine mystery, for there will be an awakening among the tyrant peoples, a conscience quickened to convict them of their sins and moving them to contrition and repentance. Thus salvation will come to the many by the mute unprotected suffering of the servant nation of God. It may seem a fantastic hope in a mind unacquainted with life's grim realities. But no! the prophet was driven to his extravagant dream because he was rooted in history: he was held by his love for his people and by the equally sure conviction that God could not be without purpose in what He allowed to fall on Israel.

Again it was in times of national anguish that another seer had his vision of the Son of Man (Dan. 7). A dictator was striving to wrench Israel from her traditions and force her into acceptance of an alien culture. In her own strength the nation had no future. Over against the brutal empires of the past, fittingly symbolized by savage beasts because of their bestial cruel policies, Daniel conceives an empire of another sort, marked by ways of reason and humanity, the kingdom of the saints of God. While persecution is still raging on earth the prophet sees in the timeless sphere above a mysterious figure brought before the Almighty on His throne and invested with royal dignity. That figure was like unto a Son of Man and he came on the clouds of heaven,

signifying that it was by the power of God that there would come this reign of the saints of God. Thus again it was revealed that the only way out of this troubled world that the sin of man had made was by the Divine intervention, and that through the instrumentality of those whose lives He had fired with His Spirit.

Hath Spoken By His Son. Matt. 16: 13-19; Mark 11: 17; Mark 14: 58.

When John the Baptist by the banks of Jordan began his mission of repentance, he may have thought of himself as calling into being such a company of the saints of God as might fall heir to all these prophetic hopes. The Day of the Lord was at hand—a great and terrible day of judgment that would see the wheat separated from the chaff. The rite of baptism was the winnowing-fan sifting out the finer souls who heard and made response to the voice of God. Jesus came forward and made Himself one with His brethren. But in the course of that experience He was called to be more than a member of that community. It was revealed to Him that He was to be Israel's ideal king, the agent and representative God had chosen to inaugurate the Kingdom without end. In the power of that call He went out and preached the Word that proved like a dividing sword, cleaving the living from the dead that must be left to bury the dead. In the Twelve whom He chose to share His work and mission He saw the nucleus of the new Divine order.

But did they recognize Him as He truly was? When the Galilean ministry drew to its close, He felt the time had come for mutual understanding. Hence the questions at Caesarea Philippi: "Whom do men say that I am?" and "Whom do ye say that I am?" It fell to Peter to make the historic declaration "Thou art the Christ." To Jesus this meant that another than Himself now shared the conviction that God had chosen Him to bring into actuality on the earthly scene the universal Kingdom of the saints. As such Jesus was more than a prophet: what the prophets had yearned for *He* was to realize. And that utterance of Peter was no mere human guess or calculated appraisal. It was an insight given by God. "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 16: 13-17). As the seers who forecast the true community had been spokesmen of a

Word given of God, so the recognition of its Messiah was an inspiration. Jeremiah had recognized that membership in the new covenant implied divine operation on the human heart. Peter was being borne into that new knowledge of God and was having a new moral sense awakened in him before he could see in the carpenter of Nazareth the Son of God. With the law written in his heart he was to become able to "bind and loose," discern the values of the Kingdom. But he had yet much to learn. When Jesus began to teach that the Son of Man must needs suffer, he protested and was rebuked. The Spirit had not yet come to abide in him: it came but fitfully as to the prophets of old. But in that high moment of inspiration when he had hailed his Messiah, the Church had been foreshadowed. He was historically the first to make the grand confession, and on this revelation granted to him as on a rock that had for a moment risen above the stormy waters Jesus saw the foundation for His community.

NOTE: This primacy of Peter was a matter of historical priority. It was not something he could transmit to his successors in office any more than Christopher Columbus could hand on his discovery of America or James Watt his invention of the steam engine.

When Jesus came finally to Jerusalem, He was well aware that hostility and intrigue awaited Him and that His days of active ministry might be few. What He chose to do on borrowed time were surely acts of calculated meaningfulness. It was His deed of temple-cleansing and the *teaching* uttered there that stung the authorities to action. What was that all-important teaching? Evidently that part of it that was quoted at the Trial had been startling to orthodoxy: "Destroy this temple made with hands and in three days I will raise another made without hands." This word has been taken to refer only to the Resurrection. But it was only when He was raised from the dead that that meaning was applied, the Fourth Evangelist tells us (2: 22). Commercialism and malpractice were destroying the Temple, emptying it of meaning. The Temple was the place where God revealed His Presence. In the blood bath of animal sacrifice and the accompanying priestly spoliation that Presence could not be manifest. But God was not thereby defeated. Jesus would raise up a spiritual temple in the hearts of His followers: the

Church would be His body. In His community of devoted disciples the Presence of God would be bodied forth. The Church is the extension of the Incarnation. The Presence of God manifested itself in the life of the new community. People coming into contact with its members felt a power, a reality that was not of earth. With Jesus came the release upon the world of a new spiritual potency, revolutionary as an element like radium in the physical world. As foretold to Nathanael, the heavens had now been thrown wide open, and remained open so that the ministries of God's graciousness kept coming continuously upon men. The Divine Presence was available now in no mere temple of stone and lime, but in a house of flesh and blood, a society of faith and love, sweetness and light.

Through the Work and Risen Power of Christ, Luke 22: 15-30.

On the night in which He was betrayed Jesus drew His disciples about Him in the Last Supper, a rite that was the sealing and designation of these first members of the new community. The bread and wine given and received along with the words of ardent expectation and promise set a glory within these lives that was never extinguished: for they then began to experience that self-communication of the Divine that has ever since then proved the strength of the Church. "I appoint unto you a kingdom," said Jesus. The joys, the privileges, the responsibilities of the new order were to be theirs. Christians are called to a sovereignty of the spirit which they exercise not from arrogant assumption, but by reason of a new insight that the Christ mind bestows: they bring standards and values into the moral life that fit them to be the judges of the New Israel. Jesus saw in these His companions through many testing months an illumination of soul that enabled Him confidently to tell His judges at the Trial that from henceforth they would see taking shape the Kingdom of the Son of Man as pictured by Daniel.

It was the experience of Pentecost that revealed to the community the reality of the spiritual contact now open to them. Seven weeks had passed since the crushing blow of the Crucifixion, and from farm to fishing-ground and from fishing-ground to farm there had flashed the news of strange happenings, disclosures of the loved presence of their Lord such as the Resur-

rection stories tell. There had been questionings and long, long silent thoughts on the part of many, and then, perhaps in that hallowed upper room amid familiar scenes, came together for the first time a considerable assembly of adherents of the Crucified One. Could so many dare to hold on to their hopes in Him? They looked round in wondering surprise. Then speech broke forth. Testimony incited testimony till faith blazed into a flame and burned away all doubt and fear. Enthusiasm and holy gladness rose to fever heat and there came the verifying proofs of the Spirit. Now they knew a power was active upon them, that power that had centred in Jesus and now had come to settle upon them; His Church, His spiritual body, had come into being.

That company at Pentecost must have been strangely startled people. They had not come to Jerusalem to found a church. They had come as the spirit bade them, expecting vaguely that they would carry through the ancient ritual of the Jewish Feast of Pentecost—to record their gratitude to the Giver of all at the close of the grain harvest. That there would be a gathering of believers in Jesus many might have hoped for, but perhaps few expected. And when they did come together, it was to enter upon an experience that was altogether beyond their calculations. Their world was turned upside down. And even when they started on their way homeward they were quite unaware of the magnitude and significance of that grander harvest of which they had tasted the firstfruits.

Brought Into Existence By God Himself. Eph. 1: 3-23; John 15: 1-17.

And so it had been down through the centuries. Men had been caught up and borne along by a tide of mysterious urgency. When Isaiah went to the Temple he probably went simply as a mourner with bent head; he came away enlightened and exalted. Could Jeremiah know that in the intensity of his seeking after God and in the intimacy of the resultant experience he was shaping a covenant relationship that was to be the foreshadowing and type of a new spiritual society? When the seer portrayed the Suffering Servant of the songs and Daniel saw in his vision one like unto a Son of Man, they showed by their vagueness and dimness of outline that they were not sketching a human reality

that their eyes had seen, but rather an ineffable wonder and glory that their eyes would fain see. When John Baptist pictured the coming one, the wielder of the destroying axe and the winnowing fan, he was far, far away from the divine reality that did step forth: a voice was speaking to him in accents that he but faintly comprehended. When Peter and Andrew, James and John, went out to mend their nets one day, they had no notion that other and finer nets would be substituted in their hands. And we can assume that the counting-house Matthew was quite astonished to find himself embark on a venture where calculations were all thrown to the winds, while hesitant doubting Thomas was the most surprised of all men when he emerged on to a platform of deliberate affirmation, "My Lord and my God!" The Church was never a matter of human planning and premeditated choice. It was God's doing throughout the centuries that all the outlines were finely drawn, and it was through the work and power of His Son that the Church became a thing of history in flesh and blood. When it did take shape, it was not the meticulous planning of a committee in Jerusalem, but a spirit-filled company that overflowed and scattered under the compulsion of persecution. That power that had descended upon the company was scouring the roads beyond and laying hold even of an enemy and persecutor like Saul of Tarsus. That timid and hunted folk should receive into their friendship an avowed enemy like Saul, that a rich man like Barnabas and many others should sell all they had and share their wealth with those who had nothing, that former revolutionaries should sit down with once orthodox and sober Pharisees and with the tax-collectors whom they had counted traitors to the national cause, that proud Jews who had always reckoned themselves a chosen race should find themselves in a society into which were welcomed Gentiles of every nation and every class—that was proof enough that the God who called men into fellowship with Himself one by one was calling them also into fellowship with one another.

The Society of the Redeemed, Ephesians 2: 1-10.

If we could mingle in that first company of the Church and begin to ask each one how he came by this new life, there would be but one answer: it came through contact with Jesus Christ

who, as St. Paul puts it, "loved me and gave himself for me." Gratitude for a graciousness that was wholly undeserved was the tide that carried man after man into the Christian circle. Paul never ceased to marvel that as he was engaged in a headlong career of hate and persecution against all who bore the name of Jesus he was "arrested," captured, led into that society of friendship and light; those whom he had persecuted kept heaping coals of fire upon his head, ministering to his needs of body and mind. That he could be forgiven his past and set upon the new road must mean that *someone* had intervened between God and his deserts, *someone* had taken his sin upon himself, and won release from all the shame of it. *That one* must be none other than Jesus Christ. So Paul's love overflowed towards his Saviour Christ, and there and then began an association that was to last all through life and beyond it. "It is no longer the old self that now rules my mind and affections: Christ has taken control of my whole being" is Paul's testimony (Gal. 2: 19f.). So completely were all his willing and desiring now centred in Jesus Christ that he was not any more just Saul the Pharisee or Paul the Roman citizen, but rather the slave of Christ completely and indissolubly commissioned for His service.

The Body of Which He Is the Head, 1 Cor. 12: 12-27; Eph. 2: 11-22.

Paul thus thought of himself as "in Christ," incorporated in a spiritual organism of which Christ is the head. As the head directs every movement of the limbs, so Christ controls all the members of His society, His body (1 Cor. 12: 12). Or, as John records the same truth: "I am the vine, ye are the branches" (John 15: 5). That does not mean that we are related to Christ as branches growing out of the stem of the tree, but rather that we are drawing from and are dependent on the life energy that flows through the whole and makes the whole a vital and fruit-bearing creation. Close fellowship with Him is the source and condition of Divine life in us. Moreover, God has made us the necessary supplement and completion of His life. In a startling phrase the Apostle calls the Church "his body, the fulness (*pleroma*) of him who is being filled or completed" (Eph. 1: 23), as if Christ were an inclusive personality who cannot reach final

fulfilment or development without the Church. The Divine purpose in the Incarnation awaits its crown and culmination in the Church. The body by which Jesus of Nazareth had expressed God's love and will to self-giving was no longer to be seen on the streets of Jerusalem or Capernaum; but now that same Spirit had in the Church an instrument that could exercise His will in wider fields than Palestine. His life flowed into every receptive member of the community as the sap of the vine penetrates to the tips of the remotest branch. His love and mercy and vital energy ever seek outlet, and in the far-branching Christian society He has renewed and extended as it were the touch of His hand, the glance of His eye, the beat of His heart. The Incarnation which began in Galilee had now become amplified and prolonged in the ever-deepening life and outreaching ministries of the Christian Church. Or, to use that other metaphor that Jesus Himself had first used, the Presence of the Living God had now come to dwell in an ever-rising and ever-extending spiritual house, Christ Himself being the corner stone, the apostles the pillars, and believers of every age and time the living stones that are continually taking their place in the cathedral that God goes on building throughout the ages (Eph. 2: 20-21). The seer of the book of Revelation saw no temple because the Lord God and the Lamb were themselves there, the living Presence and final reality.

Called to the Proclamation of the Everlasting Gospel. 1 Cor. 1: 23-32; 1 Cor. 9: 16; Gal. 3: 1-5; Rom. 10: 11-15.

Jesus came preaching and continued preaching even in the final testimony of the Cross; and when His disciples awakened to His living presence, the first impulse was to preach. It was the fine edge of his preaching that brought Stephen to the first martyrdom, and it was the call to "bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" that claimed Paul on the Damascus Road and kept him voyaging over land and sea to the end. The Church owns a New Testament that is the testimony of the first preachers, and she can hardly turn the pages without hearing the woe laid upon her if she preach not the gospel. Christ crucified is good news that will not keep, a fragrance that must cover the earth. Evangelism is an inner

necessity laid upon us all as members of Christ's body. To listen to a pulpit voice without that passion is like "drawing in your chair to an oot fire," as a Scots mother phrased it. "The church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning."

To the Loving Service of Mankind. Mark 10: 45; Luke 10: 25-37; John 13: 14-15; Rom. 12: 19-21; Col. 3: 12-17; James 1: 22-27.

Jesus came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. He took a towel and girded Himself to the most menial of services. The healing of the sick of body or of mind was the theme of His first manifesto at Nazareth; and such was the pressure of His spirit upon the first disciples that they not only healed the sick but sold all that they had and shared their goods with one another. Take a page from Paul's first contacts in Europe (Acts 16). One of the first fruits he experienced was the Christian grace of hospitality: "If ye have found me faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there" (Acts 16: 15). He is moved with pity for the damsel possessed with a spirit of divination and heals her. Immediately Christianity finds itself up against inhuman greed, for she brought her masters much by soothsaying. But the release of a soul comes before private gain. So a new conscience is born in Europe. A runaway slave finds himself in the Apostle's company. The result is a plea that the master will receive back his slave as a son (Philemon). How came to men the first hospitals, the first homes of mercy? Was not the Church a pioneer in education, in agricultural advance? How does the Church make its witness in Africa or China or India? The widow and the orphan, the sick, the depressed classes, the victims of the slave trade, can bear testimony. Social service follows preaching as the right foot follows the left in the process of making headway.

To the Worship of God. Heb. 12: 18-29; Rev. 4, 5.

But Jesus came preaching and ministering because He had first listened to the voice of God in the hour of John's baptism. And He went to that experience in Jordan because He was always about His Father's house and He went to the synagogue as was

¹ Brunner, *The Word and the World*.

His wont on the Sabbath day. It was in the sanctuary that He found His first hearers and proclaimed "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears." It was the sadness of His heart that the Temple was a place of merchandise instead of a house of prayer for all nations that moved Him to challenge finally the authorities in Jerusalem—the challenge that brought His arrest and crucifixion.

How much the world owes to the continued service of Christian worship can never be told. Enough that we catch a few fleeting glimpses of its spirit and fragrance. We recall Paul at Philippi, beginning his work in Europe, going out of the city to a quiet place "where prayer was wont to be made" by the riverside. "We sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither" (Acts 16: 13). So out of a Jewish prayer-meeting emerged the first Christian service in the Western world. "On the Lord's own day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions that your sacrifice may be pure." So runs the second-century manual, the *Didache*. From Asia Pliny writes to Rome to the Emperor Trajan (c. 111 A.D.) of the Christians there in days of persecution: "It was their habit on a fixed day to assemble before daylight and sing by turns a hymn to Christ as a god; and that they bound themselves with an oath, not for any crime, but not to commit theft or robbery or adultery, not to break their word, and not to deny a deposit when demanded. After this was done, their custom was to depart, and meet again to take food, but ordinary and harmless food." Tertullian (c.200) gives his testimony: "We are made a body by common religious feeling, unity of discipline, and the bond of hope. We come together in a meeting and assembly, that we may as it were form a troop, and so in prayer to God beset Him with our supplications. . . . We pray also for emperors, for their ministers and for them that are in power, for the welfare of the world, for peace therein, for the delay of the end. We meet together for the reading of the divine writings . . . with the holy words we nourish our faith, lift up our hope, confirm our confidence, and no less make strong our discipline by impressing the precepts. At these meetings we have exhortations, rebukes, and a Divine censorship." We mark the notes of these assemblies—the song of praise, the searching of the heart, prayer

for the world's well-being, the hearing of the Word, the making of covenant, the nursing of hope.

In hallowed upper rooms, in the catacombs, in churches mean or stately, in grand cathedrals, on the moorland when persecution came again, in manifold forms, with simplicity often, with gorgeous ritual in other days, the worship of the Church has been maintained down to modern days. Let us but pause to sense the joy of a typical Easter Day, 12th April, 1868. "The day has opened solemnly and religiously. There is a tinkling of bells from the valley: even the fields seem to be breathing forth a canticle of praise. Humanity must have a worship, and, all things considered, is not the Christian worship the best amongst those which have existed on a large scale? The religion of sin, of repentance, and reconciliation—the religion of the new birth and of eternal life—is not a religion to be ashamed of. . . . The Gospel has modified the world and consoled mankind."

The Organ of Christ's Mind. Matt. 11: 29; 1 Cor. 7: 6, 10, 12, 25; Phil. 2: 5; Rom. 12: 5-21.

When disputation arose in the band of disciples, Jesus took a towel and girded Himself; when Judas objected to the costliness of Mary's gift, He replied with a penetration that commanded acceptance. His was a moral authority that was irresistible: even His judges felt His silent power. The Church which is His body knows allegiance to Him alone as its head; therein there can be no divided authority. Yet the Church has its life to live in the human sphere, and its members are beset by contending authorities of state and class and party. Can allegiance ever be divided?

Jesus Himself recognized the human perplexity of living in two worlds, the spiritual and the material. "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." That wise word recognizes that even the imperfect institutions of earth render their service and may therefore claim their dues except where they conflict with a higher demand. The early Church caught that emphasis, and even in the face of a world that was cruel and growingly hostile continued to insist: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's

* Amiel's *Journal*, p. 140.

sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors . . . Fear God. Honour the king" (1 Peter 2: 13-17; cf. Rom. 13). States in wartime, the totalitarian states at all times, make claims on the whole life of the subject, and the dilemma must often arise of loyalty to Christ or country. There can be but one supreme allegiance, and that is to Christ. But there are dangers to avoid. The individualist may forget that he cannot live to himself: the democratic state faces a situation that his vote and defective citizenship may have helped to create and towards which therefore he has a responsibility. And to cry "conscience" is blasphemy when that word is but a screen for evading the pressure of uncongenial moral demands. He who turns a deaf ear to the urgent cry of the social whole from which he draws his well-being must be very sure that the other voice he hears is that of his one and only master Christ. The precepts of Jesus must not be used as dogmas, shibboleths that will procure an easy crossing of difficult waters. The moral sense would die if it had the simple task of merely quoting the apt saying: it is quickened by the continuous weighing of the issues in the complex situations of modern national and international life. The word of God for the man in Christ must be prayerfully sought until revealed in the individual crisis.

To Share the Life of the Whole. Eph. 4: 1-16; 1 Cor. 16: 1-4.

As we look round upon the Church today we see that she is widely scattered and deeply divided. Her far-flung frontiers are a matter of pride and joy, but her divisions and inner antagonisms are our distress and shame. Differences of interpretation as to the essentials of doctrine and practice have made deep clefs in the history of the past, and national enmities and racial jealousies have often deepened and perpetuated these misunderstandings. The life of the Church is coloured by the character and tradition of the people who constitute her membership, and often her policies become more national than Christian. There have been times when the Church was rather the promoter of her own wars than the peacemaker seeking the unity of all. And within a national religious suspicion and animosity have often destroyed true national unity.

Yet even in our time we have seen the linkage of the Church

hold across the clefs of war. Pastor Niemöller and the German Confessional Church have more affinity with the Church in England than with the Nazi rulers and policies of their own land. Chinese Christians can hold out hands of reconciliation even to Japanese Christian soldiers whose mission among them is for domination and suppression. The Roman Church continues to function on both sides of the armed camp of Europe. Humane ministries like the Red Cross operate across closed frontiers—and such an organization is essentially a creation of the Spirit of Jesus.

Thus we must recognize that there is a real unity of all Christians in Christ Jesus, a unity that is increasingly able to withstand the strains and tensions of international life. And behind the rivalries of the various communions there is a growing ecumenical movement. After all each branch of the Church asserts its loyalty to the life and creeds of the early undivided Church. Roman and Protestant treasure the same Scripture and the same central Sacraments though they may differ profoundly in their interpretation and practice. Really we are one in Christ Jesus and we each carry our lineage proudly back to the life that sprang up round the Master in Galilee and Jerusalem.

The grand conception of the Church Catholic throughout the world did not come by a federation of local churches. There never was a time when the Church thought of itself as simply a local organization. Had we asked Peter or John or Philip to what association they belonged, they would never have described themselves as members of a Christian synagogue in Jerusalem. "Ye shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel"—that implied that they thought of their membership as in the New Israel, in the new people of God, a community already having existence in the Divine mind and drawing its associates from every nation and every class.

Paul writes "to the church of God which is at Corinth," and goes on to define further: "to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place." The writer of Hebrews speaks of the general assembly and church of the firstborn. Finest of all descriptions is that of 1 Peter 2: 9: "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for

God's own possession." Elsewhere they are described as "the remnant" forecast by Isaiah, "not from Jews only, but also from Gentiles" (Rom. 9: 24-27); sons of Abraham, Abraham's seed (Gal. 3: 7, 29), the Israel of God (Gal. 6: 16); a colony of heaven (Phil. 3: 20); "sojourners of the Dispersion" (1 Peter 1: 1); "the twelve tribes of the Dispersion" (James 1: 1). Believing themselves to be the inheritors of the proud promises made to Israel, these first converts inevitably thought of their membership in the whole worldwide community, and to them each local church was, like a synagogue, but a microcosm of the whole.

Paul was the great planter of these early churches; and, beginning with a lofty conception of the catholicity and universality of the Church, he was at pains to impart that notion. His great collection scheme, to which he seems to have given some two years of his active life, was probably intended to deliver local churches from a narrow provincialism. It was just possible for an isolated little community set down in Beraea or Colossae to lose touch with the larger community. But Paul saw clearly how the annual contribution to the Temple at Jerusalem made the local Jewish synagogue conscious of its membership in the larger whole, and he coveted for his Christian communities in far-away Macedonia or Galatia a similar reminder of their share in a great worldwide movement pivoting on Jerusalem where their Lord had made His supreme testimony on the Cross. Hence his scheme to link all his churches in a common offering to be made annually to the poor saints at Jerusalem, those who had borne the first shock of the world's hatred of the new faith. For Christians in Corinth to remember the faithful in Jerusalem and for the faithful in Jerusalem to be cheered by the freewill offering of fellow-believers whom they had never seen—that was like a blood stream coursing through the body of Christ, an evidence of life and abundant vitality.¹

One in Him. 1 Cor. 1: 9-15; Eph. 4: 1-16; 1 Pet. 1: 1-9.

Churches arrogate to themselves the right of determining the conditions of membership: for order and discipline there must be such scrutiny. Yet we must confess ours are but tentative standards, and it is Christ alone who can say who are truly His.

¹ Cf. G. S. Duncan, *St. Paul's Ephesian Ministry*, p. 229ff.

We see the Church visible, but His clearer eye sees also the Church invisible of the saints on high, the redeemed of all ages. And there are those who, like the surprised folk in the parable, have done the Christlike thing unknowingly (Matt. 25: 37ff.). Our boundary lines are like the dividing wall in the old Temple at Jerusalem: they would shut out many who are true children of Abraham saved by a faith and love we cannot discern. It is not for us to unchurch one another, but rather to rejoice to own as fellow-members all who truly love the Lord Jesus Christ and seek the ends of His Kingdom.

The Church that acknowledges one only Lord and insists on a spiritual unity beneath the cleavages in doctrine and practice must ever strive to break down the barriers of division and move towards an incorporating union. A faith that can remove mountains must not suffer frustration before little things. A kingdom that is divided against itself cannot stand. Christ cannot be parcelled out (1 Cor. 1: 13). The forces of unrighteousness have won many victories because the defenders of the faith have been divided among themselves. With a wider tolerance, a larger charity, a deeper love one towards another, and an intenser devotion to Him who is the head and a holier reverence for the eternal purposes of God we would win the battle for unity, and then victory over the world. We can stop short of nothing less than victory, for that means the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The Church offers but the foretaste of that consummation to come. We churchmen are but pilgrims, staff in hand, wending our way up the valleys; sometimes the clouds lift and we have glimpses of the heights beyond. We have in our hearts the dayspring of that larger life, and we sing the songs of the City of God, and in our deeper moments of silent waiting we hear echoes of a grander music. But the glories of the Kingdom in its fullness are not for our time-worn eyes.