

Church Theories among Brethren

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online: 06.01.2024, updated: 12.01.2024

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Foreword.

The criticism of one's fellow servants is neither desirable, nor pleasant, yet its necessity is obvious, as is seen in the great conflict of ideas and views among the Lord's servants.

Infallibility is the corollary of the supposition that one is above criticism. The sense of one's own proneness to err, would make him ready to give the most careful and prayerful consideration to the criticisms of others who love the truth. The gifts to the Church of our adorable Lord are so varied that we cannot treat the views and judgment of other sound lovers of the truth with indifference, without becoming lopsided or conceited. At the same time it is of vital importance not to let go the fundamental fact that the final appeal is to the Word of God.

Those who are not open to conviction from this through party bigotry, or personal prejudice, should be left to the result of their own errors, as we treat those who are fundamentally unsound, save to expose their errors. The late Dr. Watson said "Neither a bigot, not a prejudiced person, a jester nor a monkey, are proper judges in the matters of controversy."

May our gracious and adorable Lord keep us walking in self-judgment and humility!

J.H.B.

The Sin of the Church.

Can any child of God, who knows what the Church is, deny her grievous sin as in testimony, and for what else are we left in this world, to which we do not belong? It is impossible for any one who believes, and understands, the absolute, and Divine facts of the constitution, unity and relationships of the Church as revealed in Scripture, not to see her sin, on the subjective side, and, if he has a sensitive conscience, feels it in real exercise before God.

The bulk of Christian people begin at the wrong end in their efforts to arrive at the true nature and character of the Church. They reason from the subjective to the objective, instead of from the objective to the subjective. The word of God is not to be explained by our conduct, rather, our conduct is to be ordered, and judged of, by that word. None of the great fundamental truths of our glorious Christianity are dependant upon our practical state; but the practical state is dependant upon, and governed by, and should be brought into harmony with, the absolute. In Christianity we are called to be practically what we are by sovereign grace. I am a child of God absolutely; hence I ought to be one practically, i.e., I ought to *live* as one.

The foundation, the Head, the Constitution, and the Unity of the Church, are all great and absolute facts, to which believers – having been added by God in sovereign grace- should conform. These great truths are not merely visionary ideas. They are real living and actual facts, such as are continually brought to bear, by Scripture, upon our individual and collective conduct. It is vain, unscriptural and illogical to say that all believers on earth are members of the body of Christ, yet that body is not on earth, and is invisible.

The One Body, and One Head – the One Family and one Father – the One Flock, and One

Shepherd – One Spirit and One Bible – form a unity involving relationships that carry with them the fact, and measure of our responsibility – obligations –and privileges. The moment, under an exercised conscience, this is seen, our great and sad failure becomes apparent. Ignorance of it is the reason for the prevailing insensibility to our sin, as the Church left here for testimony to the fact that the Father sent the Son. John 17:21.

Looked at as a people brought into such an unity, and such relationships, our practical condition becomes sadly indescribable. It is extremely inconsistent with the above Divine facts. The division into hundreds of Sects, Systems and Parties, with such a bable of ideas, shows, indeed, how little real sense of our dependence upon the Holy Ghost in our study of the Scriptures there has been. For that blessed Spirit sent down to guide us into all truth, is not the author of such a conflict of ideas. If we were all led by Him, we should “all speak the same thing.”

The writer feels sure that the root cause (taking into account the condition of the soul, of course) of much, if not all, the divisions; with the strife and confusion among the saints of God; is found in the differing ideas of what the Church really is, and the real character of the present dispensation – the period of her administration. There is a great lack of clearness as to the Unity, the Constitution and the Growth of the Church. Unless these are understood there can be but little practical unity, or real christian fellowship; for these latter are based upon and moulded after the great absolute facts.

Then, again, as a result of the ignorance of the above Divine facts, the absolute and the practical aspects of the truth are inexplicably muddled up. For instance, some make the local Church a thing different from the Church of God’s purpose, as revealed in Scripture. They use geographical conditions to qualify and govern the great cardinal and universal facts of Divine Revelation. Absolute relationships, for guidance, are ignored by cutting off the local Church, as such, from that Church which is the body of Christ. The *revealed* Church of God’s purpose, which Christ is building, and which the Holy Ghost unites to Christ as her Head in heaven, before the local Church theory, becomes a phantom. Note, the *Body* of Christ – we are told – is a *spirit* and is not on earth at all. The only Church on earth for these theorists is the local Church which, they say, is quite another thing! Of these there are thousands each severed from all the rest by distance of a few streets or fields! And by the supposition that they are complete in themselves.

According to the above theory the local Church is a Church without a Head, and without a foundation, for Christ is the Head of that Church which is His Body, and God has no other; the local is a part and expression of it.

The true Church is founded upon a risen Christ, by means of the Holy Ghost, sent down at Pentecost, when it began at Jerusalem. For the view in question, that first gathering of saints was a local Church, hence not that which is the body of Christ. It was The Church, there was no other. No doubt it *began* in One district, nevertheless it was that Church that Christ promised to build, and the Church of God’s purpose, so *He* began to add to it daily, and went on adding until *it* extended far beyond Jerusalem into other Cities, and ultimately all over the earth. Nevertheless it was, and is, all the same Church – united by the same Spirit, with the same Bible giving the same instructions, inculcating the same order, based upon the same

Christ, its foundation and Head, and the same body of which all believers are members. Yes, that same Jesus, it is, who is in their midst anywhere and everywhere. It is the same Church, the Body of Christ; as seen in Corinth, Ephesus, Colosse and so on. You cannot locate the Holy Ghost in one Locality in such a way as to break the link of His presence with all other localities; nor can you locate the presence of the Head to one locality in such a way as to leave all others without it. He is the one Head over the one body. But rather the indwelling of the Holy Ghost, and Christ in the midst, everywhere wheresoever there are a few saints- members of the same body – binds the whole together as one. Each local Church becoming a representation of the wonderful unity.

Nevertheless one writer who takes the local Church view, so locates Christ in heaven, that (he tells us) He cannot, *on that account*, be the Head of the Church on earth!!

You cannot separate the Holy Ghost, who dwells in every believer – so uniting all to the Head – from Christ in heaven. You might as well say that He cannot be in the midst of His gathered saints because He is in heaven, and they on earth. The implications of such an idea are serious. For one thing it implies that the Holy Ghost being on earth cannot be one with Christ in heaven! It is in believers here, in their *bodies* He dwells and so unites them to the Head in heaven, body, soul and spirit. Thus we should be “*wholly*” sanctified. 1Thess 5:23.

If we start our study in view of the above great Divine and absolute facts of the present dispensation, we shall see that the practical side of this great unity – the Church – to be consistent – is brought about by our conformity to them. That is a very different thing, from the endeavour to interpret those truths by our condition as local gatherings. We have to conform our practical state to the truth, not to conform the truth to our practical state. That is, we overhaul our practical position, or conduct, in the light of Scripture teaching, not overhaul Scripture teaching in the light of our Church position or conduct. The Church of God does not exist in what we do for God; but what He in Sovereign grace does for us. On this grand fact, our obedience is based, in answer to it.

We have such poor ideas, such poor apprehensions, of “the truth as it is in Jesus,” what He is to, and what He has done for, God, in all His personal perfections and excellencies – in all the devotedness of His love, in all the infinite value and fragrance of His marvellous sacrifice. Also, all that He is to – and all He has done for – us, all that we have and are *in Him* – and all that we soon shall be with Him. How feebly we value and enter into all this, or conform our lives to it?

We need a clearer apprehension of all that is involved in this expression-“the truth as it is in Jesus.” For us it means the condemnation of the flesh – the old nature – a new birth, hence, a new nature in every way suited to God; yea, a new creation in Christ Jesus. Also united to Him by the Holy Ghost and to each other as members of His body. We say a clearer apprehension by faith of these great and glorious truths would open our eyes to our shamefully low and lukewarm condition. Yet it is possible to know some of these sublime truths in theory only, with no mixture of real simple faith. Indeed sometimes our very familiarity with some of them makes it difficult for us to realise their magnitude, or the magnitude of the grace that made us possessors of such transcendent blessings.

A true apprehension, by a real and simple faith of the high and holy associations – the supreme and celestial relationships – into which we are brought would lead us to humble ourselves in the dust before our gracious God, in the most unfeigned self-judgment resulting in a more holy and devoted life, in testimony to a rejected Christ. Which rejection has brought upon the world the present state of things, with final judgment pending. And such a desired position on the part of the Lord's people, on a large and united scale, would bring about such a witness as our adorable Lord prayed for; "That they all may be one, that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me."

A spiritual movement of this kind among us, would sweep away mere official and sectarian Christianity. Ecclesiastical barriers and unscriptural ministerial titles would be left to the modernists and the Ritualists – two systems which stand condemned before the word of God. They are made up, for the most part, of infidels and apostates. Real and true believers would be drawn closer to Christ, and, hence, to each other in real love; and earnest desire to exalt a rejected Christ *together*, in the presence of the world that is guilty of such rejection.

Yes, we believe that a general humbling of ourselves before God in confession of the sin of the Church, and real self-judgment, would result in some such testimony. Alas! the great bulk of the members of the body of Christ are as insensible of such sin as were the Jewish people in the day of Malachi. "Wherein have we despised Thy Name"; "Wherein have we polluted Thee," and so on, is the reply to the prophet as he sought to bring it home to them. We lack even the common fear of God, acting as though we were left to choose our own way, and form our own parties with impunity, while despising the Word of God.

None of us can claim exoneration. The sin is that of the Church. "Israel hath sinned," said God, though the sin was actually committed by one man (Joshua, 7). They were one people. The unity of the Church, however, is much more intimate than that of Israel. You could not have a closer unity than, "One Body," "One Spirit," "One in Christ Jesus," "Members one of another." Where is the manifestation of this? Who would suppose such a thing by viewing the Church subjectively? Yet this unity, with its high and holy associations, forms the ground of our responsibility and the measure of our sad failure. Some say that the Church- His body – is invisible. Are men and women baptised into an invisible *Body*?

Do we understand – do we appreciate – and do we appropriate to ourselves in every-day life – the high and holy relationships into which we are brought to God – to Christ- and to each other? No mere assent or a "Yes" is sufficient answer to this important threefold question. A satisfactory reply in the affirmative can be given only in an every-day life in harmony therewith.

How can we look upon the strife, divisions, sects and parties within the precincts of the Church of God – composed of all true believers – The One Body of Christ – and not be humbled before our gracious God in confession of our sin? Where is "brotherly love" – the "love to all Saints," real Godly care for one another, united effort in real worship and true service? These are the common virtues of the members of that one body which are so continually inculcated in the Church Epistles. Are they not conspicuous by their absence? Nay, worse, displaced by their opposites. In our ecclesiastical and party strife, our respective sects (and all Church parties – or party Churches – are sects) look upon each other as enemies, and cultivate the greatest of bitter feelings toward each other. The boundary barriers between our

different parties are far greater than that of any one of them between itself and the world, which is at enmity with God. And those sects who boast that “we have left the sects” (and there are many such) are the most culpable, in this respect of unchristian feeling. For they have some idea of the true centre of gathering, and (some of them) the unity of the whole Church, on the absolute side. And yet their rules, regulations and customs are deadly set against the practical manifestation of the same. They have no respect – not to say love or interest – for believers, or even the work of God, outside our own boundary lines. We are not here inculcating association with the world nor with fundamental error, and mere professional Christianity. Indeed these are what we are passing judgment upon. We are speaking about those who love the Lord and His truth. Indeed, it is the maintenance of the fundamentals of our glorious Christianity, and not mere party Church lines, that marks a holy and separate people. But all this we go into elsewhere in a book of which this is the forerunner.

The one thing, however, that is sadly wanting all around is real love and devotedness to our adorable Lord, Saviour, Shepherd, and Friend. No one whose heart is in unison with that of Christ, will need to be warned against fixing a barrier to the activity of his own love to any others who love his beloved Lord. The heart of such an one will go out to all Saints. If you try to build a wall around him, his branches will run over it. We repeat, the fundamental doctrines of Christianity fixes its own practical boundary line; more marked than any sectarian and pretentious ecclesiasticism.

That servant of Christ who hides himself behind his party Church lines, and looks unmoved upon the sad state of the Church generally, thinking that such lines form the margin of his responsibility, as well as the boundary line of his love; knows little about the thoughts of his Master, about fellow members of the same body.

Scripture knows only one Church. The one for which Christ died, and of which He is the Head. The term Churches is simply an accommodation applied to the local expressions of the same – God has no other. For instructions and practical purposes, the great Divine facts and principles of the whole are applied to the local expressions of the same. We have an illustration, as to language, in the great Post Office system of this Country. There is but *one* such system, yet we speak of Post Offices; of which there are thousands, distributed throughout as many localities; yet they are all local expressions of that *one* firm. But we go further into this in the Volume referred to above.

The writer prays, and longs for some testimony on the part of all who love the Lord and His truth, and His people to the supreme unity, and relationships into which we are brought, if it only be in united confession, which would be the prelude to a fearless and faithful declaration of the truth of the gospel, and the position it brings us into before God – such as determines our position with respect to the world that is “at enmity” with Him – on the eve of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ to rapture His Church to glory. Then the unity will be seen, in all its perfection, as we surround Him in the air; “Caught up *together*.” Exalted be His adorable Name,

The Perfect Rainbow.

The writer feels bound in faithfulness to the Lord, and for the maintenance of the truth in the

Church, to call attention to an article in "The Witness" for October, 1939, the title of which is "The Perfect Rainbow."

The writer of this article professes to find an illustration of "the Churches of the Saints" in the Rainbow.

It is not congenial to the present writer to unfavourably criticise any of the Lord's servants who sometimes minister the Word profitably to His people, as in the case before us. A little correspondence with himself would be much preferred. One, however, wrote him on the same subject concerning an article in the same magazine some months ago, but received no reply. The reader shall have the whole paragraph that we are about to examine before him:—

The Perfect Rainbow.

Without doubt the Rainbow is the most brilliant and enchanting object in nature; especially is this so when it is a perfect and unbroken arch spanning the heavens from horizon to horizon.

Such was the scene before me as I sat on a hillside in Switzerland.

It had been a stormy day, and the massive clouds had hung around the snow-peaks and obscured them, but had now rolled away to the east in dark masses forming the background for the resplendent rainbow.

As I pondered this thought came to me. This is a perfect rainbow, and yet *it is only one of many*. No doubt in other valleys and upon other mountains, this glorious phenomenon can be witnessed in equal splendour. Yet this one I gazed upon was a perfect rainbow. It was not a section or part of those others. Each of them, too, was, in itself, perfect and complete. It was not necessary to bring them all together and in some wondrous way weave them into one to make a complete rainbow. Each was full and complete in itself. Yet *each was precisely the same as the others*. They might have been pieces of the same great masterpiece but they were not, *each was a whole, a perfect and a complete rainbow in itself*. And they were *all formed in the same way and from the same Sun*, and that was why they were all alike. Through the prism formed by the suspended moisture in the air the Sun shone and produced in each case a perfect whole.

So, thought I, are the Churches of the Saints. They are not sects or portions of a whole but each is a perfect and complete Church in itself. Each is a manifestation of the grace and wisdom of God. The Sun of Righteousness shining on the background of man's sin has produced through the prism of the Cross a perfect work of the Spirit, one of the Churches of the Saints.

Each exactly similar since all are the result of the same gracious work of God, and yet each complete in itself, needing no organisation or combination to make it one Church a complete assembly of God. Yet with all the other Assemblies enjoying 'One Lord, One Faith, and indwelt by the One Spirit'.

The whole article is most incondite. We need to remember that what the writer seeks to deny is that the Church is an organism – one body – *on this earth*. To do this he chooses a most irrelevant figure for illustration. By the fact that “it was not necessary” to bring the rainbows “all together and in some wondrous way weave them into one to make a complete rainbow,” he wishes to convince his readers that the local Churches have no uniting link on earth, binding them into one “Church which is His [Christ’s] body.” An inorganic figure is not an object of illustration against the constitution of a living organic body. As used in the article before us it only displays one thing, i.e., its writer positively denies the great cardinal truth of the present dispensation. This is the error in favour of which “The Witness” has been soliciting articles for the past two or three years.

Having thus, to his own satisfaction, given ground for the denial of the unity of the Church which the word of God states – so unambiguously – the writer finishes by a garbled quotation (avoiding the words which bear directly on the point) of the passage that so positively states the truth thus denied. “There is one body and one spirit.” Where is it? On earth, of course, the place to which the Holy Ghost descended to form and indwell it. There is only one Church built on the only Rock Foundation, viz.: – The One Body of Christ. Any Church other than that has no foundation for He only builds one; and no Head, for He is the only Head of that one Church which is His body. On the practical side, in gathering around Himself, we take the place consistent with this, as members of the same body.

The present writer has been with those of the Lord’s people who are publicly known as “The Brethren” 69 years, and in public ministry among them for 65 years, and has enjoyed much happy fellowship with them. It has, however, been the greatest grief of one’s life to watch the sad and rapid declension among them, in doctrine and practice, during the last 30 or 40 years. The Lord, before whom I write, knows that one has spent hours, continually in tears of contrition before Him confessing my sin and the sin of my people. Yet I never expected to live to see such an article as the above finding currency among “Brethren.” I can but think that both the writer and publisher of the article, must have received some letters of repudiation. The present writer, however, knows that there are spiritual men amongst us, with minds illuminated, such as carry about an exercised conscience, and a heart of love, who mourn the presence of such erroneous views concerning the great truth of the present dispensation.

The views expressed in the above article are obviously most foreign to the teaching of Holy Scripture, and in every respect radically wrong, as we show elsewhere. It rejects “the unity of the Spirit” resulting in “one Body” which we are exhorted to keep. Not a single Scripture is given as an authority for such strange ideas. Indeed, our brother must, at some unguarded moment, have allowed unlimited latitude to his imagination.

Then, after laying down, rather dogmatically, most out-of-the-way notions¹ as if they were the acknowledged teaching of Christianity; whereas they negative the one Church that Christ is building by bringing into existence thousands more Churches that man is building, each one complete in itself.

We say, after this, the article ends with a passage of the Word of God which exposes the whole fascinating picture as erroneous, for the writer has been trying to persuade us that God has thousands of Churches, each one “perfect and complete in itself,” while the only Scripture

quoted (in part) shows beyond dispute that God has but one Church, which neither distance nor locality can break up into pieces in its absolute character, with which the practical should be brought into harmony, so giving expression to the same in different localities. The full text quoted from is as follows:

- **Eph 4:4,5:** There *is* one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling. One Lord, one faith, one baptism.

The whole Epistle from which the above is quoted makes obvious, real and certain, the present establishment of these relationships.

The only conclusion that can be logically arrived at, from the above article, is that God has thousands of Churches on this earth, each one perfect and complete in itself, being exactly like each other; yet having no fundamental relationship with each other, such as would unite them into one Church which would be represented by each in its own locality. Hence each Church is said to be perfect and complete in itself, without the great truth which makes this true of the one Church only by uniting all together. The very truth which makes all saints into one Church is thus rendered superfluous. In this article it is added to the Churches of the Saints which are already each one in itself perfect and complete. Thus the most grand truth of the present dispensation – so remarkably emphasized in the New-Testament – is completely nullified.

A passage of the Word of God which describes, in the most clear and definite manner (I am speaking of the whole passage, Eph 4:2-6) the essential unity of the Church of God's purpose – of which all believers are members – God has no other, is referred to as something to be enjoyed (whatever that can mean) by thousands of Churches that are perfect and complete without it! "One Body" and "One Spirit" certainly cannot be applied to thousands of Churches, each one "perfect and complete in itself." The passage is occupied with one complete Body, not thousands of Churches. The moment you build thousands of Churches that are not that, the unity is gone. Such an ironical and perverse application of the Holy Word of God to them is an outrage on ordinary piety, on logic, and human intelligence. Our feelings are far from harsh, but we do desire to guard the Lord's dear people against an error that blacks-out the great Divine fact of the Christian dispensation.

Moreover, this "perfect and complete local Church" is of its own making, for the idea is that it is brought into existence by our gathering together in a Scriptural way. The fact is that we are already members of the one Church of God, the body of Christ, before we can so gather. In thus gathering, we respond to relationships that already exist and bind all saints into "one Body."

We have to ask also, what about the Head? There is certainly not more than one Head, so that all the thousands of Churches are without a Head, and yet perfect and complete! As surely as there is only one Head, so there is only one Church. Christ is the Head of that Church which He is building – not in some little town or village but – on the whole earth!

The wonderful truth before us (Eph 4:1-6) is not superadded to each one of the many already "perfect and complete." It is a fundamental declaration of the absolute existence and

constitution, of the only one Church of God's purpose, of which all local Churches should be a practical expression, in their own localities. Hence we are exhorted to *keep* – not to make – the unity. It is not something that applies to each local Church independently, but a great Divine fact which unites all in one, as one Body, with one Spirit, one Lord, etc.

If we may get any illustration at all out of the Rainbow, of a Local Church, it is in quite another direction to that used in the above article. It is not independent and complete in itself. It is a reflection of, or a response to, the Great Sun, the essential light of the Solar system, on which it is entirely dependent. So with our gathering together as a Church, it is not a cause in itself, but an effect of what is already absolutely true. So the gathering of the Church is giving practical effect to a great and grand truth, based upon the death and resurrection of Christ. Absolutely it makes us nothing, it is the practical manifestation of what sovereign grace has already made us. Thus it is with *all Christian* testimony, it aims not at making us something. It is just being practically, what we are absolutely. Put in another way it is answering to the responsibilities and obligation, and embracing the privileges of established relationships with Christ, with God and with each other. If it is not this, it is something that is of man, not of God.

We cannot go further into this great and transcendent subject here. We might, however, repeat that we go thoroughly into the sublime subject in a book referred to on another page. It could be shown that the article before us militates against every truth of the Gospel, for it makes the act of "gathering together according to the Word of God" bring into existence a Church that is "independent, perfect and complete in itself," yet not that which is the body of Christ, which is the only Church of God's purpose. This is a serious matter for the Church of Revelation, is the result of sovereign grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It is, as already stated, as members of this Church that we gather together in obedience to the Word of God.

If there are such Churches other than that of which Christ is the Head, they must be of man's making, for God has no other. To speak of any Church, other than that for which Christ died and is the Head, as "perfect and complete in itself" is the greatest self-righteousness. The Church of the above article is formed (as it is claimed elsewhere) by the saints gathering together, to the name of Christ. Really, it is only those who are already in the Church, in its absolute sense, that are eligible to thus gather, and such gathering becomes a practical expression of the whole, in any given place. And mostly a very unworthy expression, certainly far from "Perfect and complete in itself!"

Mark, when "The Churches of the Saints" are in view, we have the administrative and practical side of the truth before us. Such adjectives as "perfect" and "complete" can only be used of the Church in the absolute. Are the Churches of the Saints to-day each one "perfect and complete." Surely, anyone who could maintain such a thing, has little sense of his own failure. We do not believe this of our brother, but- like all who separate the local Church from that which is the true Church of Revelation – Christ's Body, he is in a complete muddle on the sublime subject.

If there is such a local Church, the writer would like to find it. He has been going about among the Churches of the Saints for 68 years, but never came across one such Church yet.

The Local Church Theory.

“The Witness” has, it appears, wholeheartedly adopted this theory, the worst ecclesiastical development among Brethren. It entirely negatives the early teaching on the most important subject in the Book of God, the fruit of His eternal counsel, i.e., “The Church which is the body of Christ.” The theory glaringly denies its present existence as a Body. Its devotees are intensely pharisaical – selfrighteous – for the Church of God is of their own building, and they tell us it is the only kind of Church of God on earth.

It has no head, for it is, they say, not the same Church as that which is the body of Christ. Hence it has no foundation, being other than that which is being built by – and upon – Christ, the Son of the living God. It has no absolute side. It is just the flimsy building of man.

The writer has pleasant remembrances of the full fellowship of the late editor, and the publisher – now editor – of “The Witness,” in the firm stand we took against this error, as invented and taught by the “Needed Truth” Brethren fifty years ago. Mr. H. Pickering also published a second book on the subject for one, a few years later, also printed and helped circulate “Church Principles,” a Quarterly, which sustained a testimony against the same error. Now, however, I am sorry to say, he has laid hold of it with both hands.

The Inconsistencies of the Theory.

Its advocates tell us that all believers are members of “The body of Christ which is the Church.” Yet that church is not on earth, indeed according to them it is invisible (and, no doubt it is *to them*). It has no real existence as a body until the end of the present dispensation. The great truth that the church *is* the *body* and the *body is* the church – that “there *is* one *body*,” is emphatically denied by G. W. E. Vine, M.A. (See his book, “The Church and the Churches.”)

If all saints are members, it follows that they all go to make up that body of which they form a part, and that they are on earth, and visible enough, needs no proving. This one point exposes the error of the whole theory, but there are many more, as we show, just as poignant.

Teachers of the errors are sound enough on the great fundamentals of the Gospel. They rightly preach that salvation is by sovereign grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and yet that same salvation *brings us into the church which is the body* of Christ, as well as bringing us into the relationship of children of God, and that obedience is consequent upon life in Christ. Still, most inconsistently, they endeavour to maintain that the local church is brought into existence by believers gathering together according to the Scriptures. That is, brought about by our obedience to the Word of God. Hence, proving the above charge that *their* church on earth is of their own building, it is *consequent* upon their obedience! Therefore, there is nothing absolute about it. It occupies believers more with the place than with the Person – more with what man is doing than what God is doing, and one of the most lamentable results is that it affords a hiding place from the sin of *the* church for those who teach it. For, according to the theory, there is no one body – or Church – on the earth with the responsibility and immense privilege, to manifest its unity in convincing power to the world. John 17:21.

This accounts for the lack of humiliation and confession before God and real separation from the world. Also the want of a more clear enunciation of our heavenly citizenship, and pilgrim and strangership.

It should be said here that we gather around our adorable Lord because, by belief of the Gospel, we are built by Him into His Church. Therefore, He is our true centre and Head, hence it is the right and proper thing to do. For whatever aspect it may assume there is no other Church that is of God. Obedience is consequent upon the relationship, not the relationship consequent upon obedience. "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it." It is well also to remember that such a gathering to our Lord in these days of scattering, is only remnant in character.

The one is built by sovereign grace on the sure foundation of "The Son of the Living God"; the other – that of theory – by human effort on the foundation of sand. Some storm of disagreement, or division arises and the latter comes toppling down. It is thus before our eyes every day. Yet this is what one writer calls a church "perfect and complete." Another calls it "The Church of the living God!" The just conclusion, however, from the theory is, that this is the only "Church of God" on the earth formed – it is said – by our coming together in obedience to the Word of God. We might just as well say that we become children of God by obeying the voice of our Father as to our conduct.

The truth is that neither would be in obedience to the truth, to obey which we come together in acknowledgment of, and in harmony with, and consequent upon, established relationships. It is strange that these Brethren will not see the truth as so plainly presented in the Word of God, viz.: that we are all united to Christ by the same life, Christ *is* our life, also that we *are* united to Him by the same Holy Spirit. What a unity! A unity that we are called upon to keep and to manifest in testimony to a world that rejects Christ.

The body is a real present and corporal fact. "There is one body," and "There is one Spirit" which indwells every believer, and so unites all to Christ, the Head. There is not two Spirits. "By *one* Spirit we are all baptized into *one* body," not into another Spirit entity. A body cannot be that, nor is it invisible, unless it be to the blind. It is men as such, body, soul and spirit, that form its members. Thus the truth is presented in the Scriptures. "Know ye not that *your bodies are* the members of Christ and the temple of the Holy Ghost"?

It is quite true that those members who have died will require to be raised incorruptible, and for those who live, that this mortal shall be changed to an immortal body. Thus at the Lord's coming all will be brought into the most perfect harmony with that celestial sphere and glory to which we are destined. A marvellous change of state and sphere, but not of Relationship!

Thus the Church is viewed as a Body now and will still be a body then, though a changed body. Now it is a growing body, it is being edified, and this will go on until the Divine stature is reached – "Till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, into a perfect man, the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." Then the consummation of our God's purpose will appear in all its excellency, perfection and glory.

Is it not sad that there are not wanting those among the servants of Christ in our midst, who, in

the face of such concrete evidence are denying the presence of a real growing “body” “which is the Church,” with all its living members, on this earth? Thus saith the Word of God, “No” say the local Church theory teachers, “there is no visible body of Christ on the earth.” This, however, is such a clumsy and impious perversion of Holy Scripture, that such perversion is apparent to every unprejudiced student. Where else is the Church in process of building? Scripture always views it as on earth!

There are so many clear, simple and unambiguous statements in the Scriptures, that the theory is so directly up against, that it stands exposed to every subject and unprejudiced reader. Shall we reiterate a few of the passages? “There *is* one body” Eph 4:4. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles.” “Ye *are* the body of Christ and members in particular” 1Cor 12:14,27. “For the edifying of the Body of Christ” Eph 4:12. “For we being many *are* one bread, *one* body” Cor. 10:17. “For as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office, so we being many *are one body in Christ,*” and “*every one members one of another.*” Rom 12:4,5. “Know ye not that your *bodies are members of Christ*” 1, Cor. 6: 15. “That they also may be one in us *that the world may believe* that thou hast sent me.” John 17:21.

Note: All these are given in view of practical effect.

Is it a Spirit entity that is being edified in view of growing to perfection? Do the members in that entity “hold office?” Do they need to be warned against becoming “the members of a harlot?” Can the world observe the testimony of a unity which is invisible? Is it not perfectly clear that the body is composed of all believers – living responsible members – on this earth? Does God send His Word – pregnant with description and instruction – to a phantom that has no existence save in His own mind? Shocking says the reader, perhaps a teacher of the theory. If so, let him study “The Church and the Churches” (reviewed in the book announced in the following pages), and the articles in “The Witness” here referred to, and see if the above “shocking remarks” do not aptly express, and expose, the idea that the Church which is the body of Christ, is not on earth and is invisible to all but God, is a Body hidden in Himself. It is shocking indeed.

I am truly sorry to have to pen such a quotation as the following by a servant of Christ from whom I should never have expected such words:—

There is an invisible, indivisible, inviolable Church, spoken of as ‘the *body* of Christ,’ in it are included *all born-again persons* of this Christian age. *I cannot join this Church.* If I am a christian I am already in it. The Spirit of God incorporates every one whom He indwells, at the very moment of conversion. This incorrupt Church is not expressed by any or all the visible congregations extant.²

Every passage the writer refers to for support strongly condemns his theory, as we show elsewhere.

The statement throws confusion into the Scripture presentation of the Church by contradictory phrases. For instance, the writer tells us that the Church as the Body of Christ is invisible; yet “in it are included all born-again persons.” Is a body composed of such members, indeed – a

body of any kind – invisible? Again we are told that “the Spirit of God incorporates everyone whom He indwells, at the moment of his conversion” which is quite correct. Now, “incorporates” as a verb means to embody – to combine into one body. The word does not agree with invisible, nor can invisible be applied to real corporal “persons.” This is not a quibble about words. The essential nature of things important are at stake. Do human beings “at the very moment of conversion” become invisible? Are all believers over the whole earth who, it is agreed, are baptized into that one body, invisible? According to the theory under review, they are, for they are all members of this one body which is invisible.

The two other adjectives in the above quotation are indeed true of the Church in her absolute aspect. The Church is “indivisible” and “Inviolable,” so indeed is the position of the individual believer on the absolute side. There is, however, another side to both. The object of all instructions and exhortations of Scripture is to bring our practical lives into harmony with our absolute relationships.

As to the article by C.F. Hogg in the June, 1940, issue, entitled “God the great Gatherer.” It is most pitiable. We ask in all sincerity, would ten per cent, of English readers understand it? Only such as know the sinful theory of the writer could do so. The title itself is a misnomer. It can only be applied to the absolute side of the truth – The Church which is the body of Christ, which He is gathering out of the world here on earth, a truth which the writer of the article utterly rejects. It (the article) does not show common reverence for the Word of God. Nothing could be put more clearly into plain and simple language than is the fact that God – as we have already shown – has one Church which is Christ’s body, as He has also one family – “All ye are brethren,” that is, all saints who are born again. Yet C.F.H. declares that there is “not one church on earth, but churches of God are found in the New Testament.” We only need refer our readers to the New Testament, especially Paul’s Epistles, to see for themselves the fallacy of the article.

The teaching that the Church which is being built on a risen Christ is not on earth, yet thousands being built by men on earth, stands condemned by the plainest possible statements of Scripture as Satan’s lie.

It substitutes man-built Churches for God’s one absolute Church, of which, alas, too often it may be said, “for, they say, the temple of the Lord are these, while covetousness, jealousy, envy, and strife are in their hearts. (Jer 7:4.)”

However, further complications are involved. What about the majority of the saints of God who are not in the local churches of the theory? Are not they in the church that Christ is building? If so, are they not on earth? If all the saints of God on earth are members of the church which is the body of Christ, are they not on the earth? Is there any *absolute* relationship – to God, to Christ, and to each other- that is true of the church of the theory, that is not true of all saints? Are the man-built churches of the theory more to Christ than that which He Himself is building? Indeed, *is* there any other church but this latter? Are not the *churches* just local expressions of this same one church?

The more this sinful theory of the Church of God is studied by such as “search the Scriptures daily to see if these things are so,” the more clear will it become to them that it displaces the

Church which God is building by thousands of man-built ones. The theory rejects the plain declaration of God that "There is one body" which is the Church, just as there is "one Spirit" by which that one Church is associated to Christ, its Head in Heaven!

Nothing could be more sectarian than a local church practically severed from the body of Christ! Nor could anything display such depreciation of the sovereign grace of God and corresponding exaltation of man.

Neither space nor time effects the absolute unity of the one church which is the body of Christ. Divine principles are universal and eternal.

The paragraph at the bottom of page 82, column one, makes pedantic nonsense. The Greek preposition referred to may be translated variously by four English words, according to the case or setting, viz.: – on, onto, in and into. Here the writer of the article uses the only one that makes nonsense of the passage. A name represents the person who bears it, it may at the same time indicate character, but not primarily. Gathered into a person is outrageous. "To," "unto," or "in the name of," would be correct.

"God is the gatherer" is not a Scripture phrase, and if used it can only be in an absolute sense, its application to the passage "where two or three are gathered together to my Name" is gratuitous – pure interpolation. This passage is addressed to the response of His people, hence subjective. The term may correctly be applied to Acts 2:47. "The Lord added to the Church daily," etc., where the word would be entirely absolute. Which passage exposes the sin of these articles in "The Witness" which deny the fact (taught and supported by scores of passages of the Word of God) that God has One Church, One Body and One Spirit on the earth. God began to add to the Church at Pentecost, and has gone on adding daily ever since, and will go on doing so till she comes to the stature of the fulness of Christ.

It is quite true that each local Assembly is responsible for itself, so indeed is each individual responsible for himself. As to the relationship of Assemblies to each other, it is just that which is true between two brothers in any one of them. We are all brethren, just as we are all members of the body of Christ and of each other.

The words in the article "Not one Church on earth" are in direct contradiction to the passage quoted in the first paragraph "That they all may be one ... that the world may believe that thou hast sent me." (John 17:21.) There are three aspects of unity in this marvellous chapter – verse 11, "That they may be one as we are" absolute unity – verse 21, unity in testimony, and verse 23, "Made perfect in one" in glory. The words "they" and "they all" embrace all saints, the chapter itself makes this clear. All are members of the body of Christ, which is looked at as a growing body on this earth. (Eph 4.)

If God is not doing this marvellous work of sovereign grace – forming this wondrous unity of the Church, the body of Christ which mystery is revealed and made manifest – on earth, where else is it being manifested and accomplished? The phantom that Mr. W. E. Vine makes of the body of Christ – the church – in his book, "The Church and the Churches" is a most obvious and serious perversion of the Scripture presentation of the same, as we show in the book announced at the end of this pamphlet.

Can anything be more contrary to the teaching of Scripture than thousands of local Churches, each complete in itself, with no uniting bond bringing them into the most intimate relationship with Christ, the Head, and with each other as “One Church,” “One Body,” by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost? Such a unity is always presented in the Word of God in the present tense. “There is one Body and one Spirit,” just as actual and real as the fact that we “are called in one hope of our calling.” We “are members of Christ.” “We being many are one body, and every one members one of another.” All this is sharp, pointed and clear. Those relationships are revealed as present realities and brought to bear upon our present conduct. All this, as a present corporal actuality, is denied (misinterpreted is not the word, the statements lend not themselves to it) by the theory here examined.

Little respect is shown for the clearness and unambiguity of statements of Scripture on this subject. They must be made to bend to the support of the theory.

An Announcement.

This short paper is sent out as a forerunner of a volume, nearly ready for the Press, entitled, “Church Theories Among Brethren.”

The word “Brethren,” for the writer, includes all true believers, but it is used here in its Denominational application, to various parties thus known.

The work has been in hand for six years. The Author giving as much of his time as could be spared by a life kept busy by both audible and written ministry. For, though 85 years of age, it has pleased our Gracious God so to renew one’s youth, for this and other work, that one is enabled to go up and down the country ministering the word as at 45. And he is more happy in this blessed work, than ever before. Blessed be His Holy Name! “The Kingdom, and the Power, and the Glory are His.”

Every paragraph of “Church Theories Among Brethren,” has (metaphorically speaking) been written upon one’s knees, and every page bathed in tears of contrition; while “confessing my sins and the sins of my people,” bowed under the burden of the sin of the Church, on the eve of the coming of her Lord, and under the sense of the urgent call for a special testimony to a world over which judgment is pending, and about to fall. A faithful and fearless proclamation of the truth is urgently called for.

The contents of the book form a thorough study of the whole subject of the Church, in her absolute and practical aspects. Some erroneous teaching about local Churches, such as deny the Scriptural constitution of the whole, in her absolute character, is carefully examined and exposed.

The above few words, about the writer and his book, are deemed – by honesty – to be called for in this announcement; as its object is to solicit fellowship and co-operation in the work of circulation. Such solicitation is made only to those of the Lord’s people who can look upon the effort as of the Lord, and act for and with Him, not merely for, and with, the writer; though he welcomes co-operation in what he himself believes to be the Lord’s work. “Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.” The word of God is the only criterion.

One way to help in this is to order one or more copies of the book, which will be published, if possible, at 2/6 (certainly not more than 3/6)—payment on delivery. Another way would be to circulate this pamphlet; which may be obtained at 3/- per dozen.

This appeal is made, not to any particular sect or party, but to all who love our adorable Lord – His truth and His redeemed people; and who would therefore desire to see a movement of the Spirit of God, resulting in a united effort to bear a faithful testimony before the world on which judgment is about to fall. Surely it becomes all members of the Body of Christ who may at any moment, be caught up “*together*” with those who will be raised from the dead – “to meet the Lord in the air” – to show a united front before the world. This is due in faithfulness to our blessed Lord; also, as a testimony, in faithfulness to the world that rejects Him, and is about to fall under His Judgment.

Sincere questions will receive Godly attention.

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Footnotes

[1] Such as numbers of Churches “each perfect and complete in itself,” “not sects and portions of a whole,” i.e., not portions of the Church which Christ is building, for which He Died and of which He is the Head.

[2] J.B. Watson in *The Witness* of April, 1940. Emphasis my own.