

## The Church: Its Present State and Prospects

"Selections from the Writings and Ministry of G. V. Wigram."

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There is, in the very nature of things there *can be*, but one First Cause of everything. There is such an One — the living and true God. He is, self-existent, never had beginning, eternal; never ending, everlasting; the alone infinite in power, and therefore irresponsible, and knowing no check or impediment to His will or action, save that of His own character and essential goodness and truth. "The right" is always His, Himself is the standard of what is right; He is the One First Cause, originating source of everything that ever was brought into creature-existence, Sustainer in being, and Controller here or elsewhere, of everything, the End for whom it was formed, to be to His glory and praise.

He has been pleased to act, and to speak in and by — creating, providing, and ruling all things; and *man* down here on earth.

He has chosen, too, to write a Book, by His Holy Spirit, about His counsels and plans concerning the Son of His love — and the glory which He will *win* — of a new heavens and new earth wherein shall dwell righteousness, after — Himself having become the way, and revealing the way into that glory for man.

What creature is there that is not morally bound, and responsible at its own peril, to own in every way the One who created it, upholds it, and over-rules it, and everything else, and who has said that He will turn everything to His own glory — one way or another, in weal or in woe.

But man in fallen nature ignores this as to himself, and questions it as to others. And why? Simple but solemn reason (which accounts, too, for the scoffing of the infidel scoffer): Adam and Eve apostatised from God, left their creature position, their first estate of innocency and dependent obedience to God, and were turned out of Eden. And "Adam begat in his own likeness and after his own image," and such are we all, as born in that family, apostate in the Adamic nature from God: in creature-apostasy. Let the predicted great white throne of judgment-to-come convince you that God is God; and means to make known His rights everywhere, ere the last grains of sand in time's stinted measure run out.

The Lord God has stood in connection with man, in creation, providence, and government, and given tokens, out of all number, of His eternal power and Godhead, of His patient goodness in caring for man in all his wants, and of His power to keep evil in check for Himself. But alas! man has renewed, times out of mind, proofs that he is, — and, if left to himself, ever will be — nothing but apostate, standing off from Him as far as he can, his back to God, and his face to the pleasures of self. And what is to be the end of all this? Scripture says — Wrath.

Notice well two things revealed in Scripture, and confirmed by facts. Israel was the centre of God's governmental\* plans for the earth. And to this day that nation and its land are the touchstone of everything in the politics of the whole earth. So —

When the Messiah had been crucified and was gone to heaven, God as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, formed the church down here on earth. One church was, by the power of the Holy Spirit (come down from heaven with the view of raising and maintaining a testimony to God and Christ in heaven) dwelling in the church, to be the proof to man that the Father sent the Son. And that church has become, in one way or another, the touchstone of everything in the profession among men of being

in connection with the God of heaven and with true worship.

\*It was, I think, Canning who saw this, and avowed in Parliament that Palestine was the central question of the politics of the earth, and spoke about the awful war of principles and races yet to come. The Crimean war had its origin in a quarrel about what they call the Holy Sepulchre and who should keep the keys of it, Romish priests, or Greek. This drew in Louis Napoleon as the Eldest Son of the Romish, and the Emperor of Russia as the head on earth of the Greek Church. Prophecy is clear as to the Land being yet redeemed and governed again righteously.

It is so *now*; it is so *here*; it is so everywhere throughout the whole habitable earth. I am bold to say that "*the church*" is now to man-religious just what *the people* and *land* of Israel have been and are to man-under-civil-government.

The key of every question in government and in religion is found in the Son of Man who sits in heaven — He is, on the one hand, the root and offspring of David; and, on the other, the bright and morning star — (Rev. 22: 16) *i.e.*, the King that Israel looks for, as yet to come in the name of Jehovah, is the same as the Lord Jesus the Saviour, who is coming to fetch home His Father's heavenly children.

Israel, under Moses and under Solomon, knew that if the Lord God their King was honoured, then they were at the head of everything; — dishonoured, and the four Gentile Beasts were at the head, and they became as the tail; though the Beasts, some of them, might not understand God's why-and-because of such changes. So -

The Holy Catholic church at Pentecost (while the Holy Spirit was owned, as in Peter's and Paul's days) knew this — that the Holy Spirit given of God to the Lord Jesus to shed abroad as the Father's token of His delight in Christ (who, had made His throne to be the mercy-seat, and Himself on it to be the life too of His people) made the church a habitation of God through the Spirit. Thus Jesus, the crucified on earth, made by God in heaven to be Lord and Christ, Sender down of the Spirit, while He was honoured, His company, or Society, reflected the perfect unity of His oneness with the Father; dishonoured, and *Ichabod* (where is the glory) became stamped upon the company professing to be His church; though that on which and that by which *Ichabod* was so stamped might not understand the why-and-because of the change.

If there was an absolute, irresponsible Theocracy in the nation, Israel, as to civil government, there was an absolute, irresponsible Theocracy set up in those that formed the church, as to worship. In the one, the only true and living God, as dwelling between the Cherubim, was known in rule: — in the other, the Lord Jesus Christ as sitting at the Father's right hand on the throne of God in the majesty of the highest in heaven, was made known (by His Spirit) in worship, and moral and spiritual rule. The setting up was of God — the continuance down here of what was set up, depended upon man's being subject to the blessing, and so enabled to answer God's purpose in it. God alone has unquestionable rights. God alone and His written Word are to be listened to. He will teach those who wait on Him. The question, *now*, is not — *Why* did He speak by a Balaam? *Why* through the mouth of his dumb ass? *Why* set Saul among the prophets? and Jonah? or *Why* Judas among the apostles? but, (alas that one should have to quote Pilate) "What is \*truth?" That is the sole question.

\*Singular! that 'Quid est veritas,' *What is truth*, by a slight transposition of the letters, becomes 'Est vir qui adest' '*the man who is present.*' - A word this for any Romanist.

Let not any of the religious, or any of the irreligious who may read this — be offended at the simplicity and plain speaking of one who desires their good. Though desirous to offend none — yet would he, in love to all men as men, risk the giving offence, if so be that he might gain their

consideration of the weighty truth which presses upon his own soul as being truth, in the mind of God about them; and judged by him to be so, because *so It is written*. Bitter shame is it to name it, yet it is truth; for so *It is written*. The knowledge of it is bitter to the soul of the true Christian, yet all must know it in order to escape worse sorrow still.

Christianity, the Christian religion, as set up in and among men on the day of Pentecost by Christ, has, as a system, utterly failed — been betrayed by the professed holders of it, self-betrayed. Betrayed from within, it has become full of deadly evil. It is become Christendom already, and soon it will pass away, as did Jewdom, and be set aside. That is, if Christ's predictions in the written Word; if Peter and John and Paul's writings (i.e., the Holy Spirit's) cannot be broken, John 10: 35.

Reader! Are you aware of this? Are you prepared for it? Upon such a subject, after such a statement, it is not for man to sport his thoughts. Of what worth are man's thinkings? Let Christ Himself be heard, and then the Holy Spirit, in what He has written through Peter and Paul and John. Surely God knows man and his language well enough to express what He means to convey, so plainly as that he that runs may read. He is not the only one who cannot express, and lay home on our minds too, what He wants us to know — as some men think. God's written Word, it was, to which the Lord Himself deferred and bowed, as Servant of God, when He said, "If you (Jews) believe not his (Moses's) writings, how shall you believe my words? (John 5: 47).

Let us now look at *the testimony of our Lord, that as Israel would be set aside, so that which would take their place would likewise fail and be set aside*. In Matt. 12: 46-50, on account of the Jews' wickedness, the Lord declared that to Him ties-in-nature were and should henceforth be nothing; but ties in the Spirit, to hold and do the truth, alone constitute relationship to Him. Then follows:

Matthew 13. "Behold, a sower went forth to sow." (v. 3) — He had brought the seed with Him, and here He *came forth to present* it, even as He, just before, had *come forth* from the house. It was seed *to be sown* — not fruit to be gathered as under law — Israel had none to render, and He came forth, here, to sow what might bring forth fruit. [NOTE: As another has suggested it is not the Jew under law, but man under the word of the kingdom]. Doubtless the seed was of the best quality.

"As He sowed." (As it was Himself who sowed — the sowing was perfect, according to His aim at the time). But the counterworking elements and the circumstances of the ground are noted. And why did He do it so? He was wise, and knew the mind of Him whose servant He was.

The seed, we shall find, was not, here, merely *the word* of God, which is in itself the expression of His authority — and to man always a gift, and yet a test; but it was the word *of the kingdom* of heaven, about to be opened by the Son of Man to as many as received it. Grace alone could propose connection with God and Christ (in a kingdom of heaven) to poor sinners that received and acted upon the word.

1st. (v. 4) Way side sown, and the fowls came and devoured the seed;

2nd. (v. 5) Stony places, and not much earth;

3rd. (v. 7) Thorny places, and the thorns (at least) sprang up;

4th. (v. 8) Good ground — which alone brought forth fruit, some an hundred, and some sixty, and some thirty fold.

Christ teaches, here, that He knew beforehand, and would have us to know beforehand, that *the word of the kingdom* (v. 19) which He brought and spread abroad — *first of all* makes manifest the enemy, of it, and of Him, and of us — that marks one danger; and, then, the character of that in which

we live is made manifest; whether flesh in its own nature, or the world; — and, after that, we learn that but one out of four such appropriators of it, in the end gets the blessing of the seed sown. Solemn is it as warning as to what man is, and where, and what his circumstances. The sower was not sowing a *field* of wheat now — that came afterwards (v. 24); but, here, He used His word, not limiting scattering to the prepared field; — and it had a fourfold experience. The word of God is always a detective test, and makes manifest what it comes in contact with: — out of four cases, it is only creative (so to speak) and fruit-bearing in one, through grace. As the word of the *kingdom* (of heaven) it brought the Sower's rich grace to light. But how solemn the warning to those to be taken as occupying Israel's lost place. And yet, if such warnings are received into the soul, it is (not only "forewarned, forearmed" as men say, but) graciously broken down out of all self-confidence and self-complacency, and so weaned from self; and it casts its all upon Him who never fails, and never will fail, those that trust to Him alone. The word was a word of grace, and sent in mercy; but man knew neither what it meant, nor himself and his circumstances as opposed to it. In itself it was fruit-bearing if it took its own natural course.

In 1. The word of the kingdom was *heard*, but not understood. Deep the responsibility to man from God's thus sending a sower, and such a sower. This and it not known — the wicked one comes and snatches away that which was sown *in the heart*, [mark this, as showing the responsibility of men hearing the word] Satan, and then men under him (though unconscious of being under him and robbed by him, and ignorant of their responsibility), are detected by their want of understanding of the word (v. 19).

In 2. It was *received* — heard, and anon [immediately] *with joy* received, yet had no root in the man himself — lasts but for awhile — but when persecution or tribulation arises on account of the word, by and by [the same word as "anon "] he is offended. Feeling is not conscience; it will act *forthwith* [immediately] to receive; but if tested by trial from within or without (of what the relationships, there, are toward the word), the receiver is, as it were, caught in "a trap" by opposition of feelings.

In 3. The thorns — care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches [the first acting on the heart of the poor man, the second on that of the rich] they sprung up [Did the wheat shoot at all, or was it merely received? It is not said which, in v. 7 or 22] and choked the word, and it was fruitless.

In 4. The word is received when heard, and *it is understood*. But, note it well, nothing came out but what was inside of it (23). The *good* ground was ground *fit* for its development — as legality and self-righteousness in man are fit for Moses' law, and the heart of a Saul, made to know himself as "of sinners, the chief" (an utter wreck too), was fit for mercy and grace.

What I glean from the parable, is this. Christ knew beforehand, and would have us to know, that the gracious word of the kingdom (when, Jews having failed under law, He addressed the word to man as man) is detective of everything in and around the one to whom it comes. A deep responsibility, to have it sent to us; high privilege too, if we know ourselves to be ruined sinners; — germ of blessing too, but only to those who know that which is in their circumstances, and themselves, *but* that in the scene too there is Another, and He brings the word *as His remedy* to us in utter ruin. Then it is fruit-bearing, and surely a blessing *if* we are really subject altogether to it. God's word accomplishes itself, where it has its sway — and is (through the last Adam) creative anew to us and, so, fruit-bearing. The Lord closes with the solemn words — "*Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.*"

2ndly. But, that there may be certainty to us about this failure of man in man's present responsibility, Christ gave a *second* parable (v. 24-30). (See Gen. 41: 32.) That of the sower was a sort of introduction. The field of wheat follows — *likewise to prove a failure* in man's hand. Both parables

teach the same lesson, methinks.

v. 24-30. Another parable put he forth to them, saying,

v. 24. The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man [v. 37, the Son of Man] who sowed good seed [v. 38, the children of the kingdom] in his field [v. 38, the world; not the church];

v. 25. But, while men slept, his enemy [v. 39, the devil] came and sowed tares [v. 38, the children of the wicked one] among the wheat, and went his way;

v. 26. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.

v. 27. So the servants of the householder came and said to him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? Whence then has it tares?

v. 28. He said to them, an enemy has done this. The servants said to him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?

v. 29. But he said, Nay; lest, while ye gather up, the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them.

v. 30. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest [v. 39, the end, (lit. common ending of the world, *lit.* age)] I [v. 41, the Son of Man] will say to the reapers [v. 39, the angels]: Gather together (v. 41, *g.t.* out of the kingdom all things that offend (*lit.* snares laid for an enemy)), and those who do iniquity (or lawlessness) and bind them in bundles to burn them [v. 42, and cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth]: but gather the wheat into my garner; [v. 43, Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father]. Query, is there a contrast here to the kingdom of the Son of Man, v. 41?

Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Note it — the parable was spoken in public, but the explanation given only in private, to the disciples, and only (v. 36-43) after He had sent the multitude away (v. 36) and the disciples had asked Him its meaning.

What is the instruction given to the verses 24-30, by the inspired explanation in 33-36? but just this; the Son of Man sowed [originated] a company and companionship of the children of the kingdom in the world. While His servants who should have watched, slept — the devil came and planted among the wheat, children of the wicked one. This became apparent after a time, and those that *had been asleep*, asked, should they go and root\* up those the devil had sown *while they slept*? No: lest you root up the wheat with the tares. A party that had been sleeping, instead of watching, is not the one to correct the results of the devil's hatred against the field-owner. Angels shall be sent, at the period of the common ending of the age, to gather out the tares for burning, at the time of harvest. Satan's children shall go to his place. The Lord will take the righteous into the kingdom of the Father. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

\*Rooting up *is, out of this world*, by killing; — not discipline in the church. It should kill no one. The most it can do is to put people out of itself, so that it may not sin.

Here was a second proof of how man, under the present trial, would fail; we may say, alas! has failed, though the Son of Man will keep His own through all the evil; Satan's craft, man's flesh (asleep at one time, too ready to cut off with the sword at another time), and this world of mixtures, good and bad together in it — notwithstanding.

3rdly. Then follow *two* more predictions in parables to the same effect,

1. v. 31, 32 show how Christ foresaw it all and warned about it. The kingdom of heaven entrusted to man's responsibility, instead of being a kingdom of heaven and of heavenly people and principles, would (through Satan's agency), become (monstrous!), not a lowly plant that proclaims its own lowly origin, but a big tree on earth, for devils [v. 32, the fowls of the air, which in v. 4, 19 is the wicked one] to lodge in the branches thereof; [a great tree, Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4: 10, and v. 12, 20-23,) was a great tree. Ezek. 17.]

2. v. 33, We have another parable proving the same thing. Note it, leaven *is never once* used in Scripture for truth, the gospel, or anything good. Leaven and honey were prohibited to be offered to God (Ex. 34: 25; Lev. 2: 11; Amos 4: 4, 5). And Paul writes, "Keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5: 6-8), which, to the Scripture student, is decisive.

Can any one read this chapter thus far in God's presence, and not see that the Lord foresaw, and forewarned in it, of the entire *failure in man's hand* of the trust made to him of the kingdom of the Son of Man? Not so — if taught of God.

4thly. In the rest of the chapter, He shows that though (as above) in man's hand all will fail, *in His own hand as Son of Man* there will be no failure. He loves His own divinely, and will secure what He loves, and seeks, to the end. See the three parables of the "treasure hid in a field" (v. 44); "the one pearl of great price" (v. 45, 46), and "the net cast into the sea" (v. 47-50).

Oh that my reader might ponder and understand these things! What is man? And what has man ever wrought! And what is the latest of man's failures?

Again, God the Holy Spirit, who wrote down Christ's testimony, has confirmed it all, by writing down that which Himself moved Peter, and John, and Paul, and Jude, etc., to teach and to understand. They all were witnesses of the same truth as Christ had taught.

What else did the Holy Spirit mean when He moved Peter to write the 2nd and 3rd chapters of his Second Epistle?

What, when He guided John to name the antichrists [substitutes for Christ]? Who was John's antichrist (1 John 2: 18)? Who, they whereby we know that it is the last time [hour] and v. 22 and 23, and again 1 John 4: 1-5?

What did Jude mean in his heart-stirring warnings? What, Paul in his Second Epistle to the Thessalonians? What the meaning of the testimonies of Paul and of John concerning the two mysteries, when laid, the one alongside of the other?

The apostle Paul (1 Cor. 4: 1) writes, "Let a man account of us (apostles) as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries\* of God." Reader! join with me in so reckoning them, and let us read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest what they write.

\*A *mystery* in the Scriptures of the apostles and prophets after Pentecost (before that it does not occur), means *that which is truth that was, or had been, hidden*. So far as the Lord, or Paul, or John has solved the closed enigma, so far we are bound to receive the explanation as authoritative; where it has not been solved, there we have still to wait, as, for instance, as to the number of the beast, 666. Just so in types; that which the Holy Spirit says or refers to as a type, we must receive as scriptural instruction. [If I owed a hundred pounds, my creditor might accept gold dust, or silver in the ingot, to that value, if he pleased, but coin of the realm having the *stamp* (type) is by government authority, a legal tender, and he *could not refuse it*. Every similitude in Scripture is not a type].

There are two mysteries in Scripture which are in strong contrast: viz.

1. The Mystery of Christ.

The good one is thus honourably spoken of, as the wisdom of God in a *mystery*, 1 Cor. 2: 7; and (the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ) the *mystery* of His will, Eph. 1: 9: and the mystery of Christ, 3: 3, 4, and Col. 4: 3; and the great *mystery*, Eph. 5: 32; the *mystery* of God, Col. 2: 2, and Rev. 10: 7; the *mystery* of godliness [or piety] 1 Tim. 3: 16.

2. The mystery of iniquity or lawlessness (2 Thess. 2: 7).

The evil one is branded and is full of evil — evil of man's pride and self-will, through misapplication of Scripture, to his own exaltation, as though himself and not Christ (a saviour of lost ones) was and is the centre as well as motive and end of God's treatment of everything: (see above in Matt. 13: 11; Mark 4: 11; Luke 8: 10). It is thus stigmatised as infamous in Rev. 17: 5, 6: "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth, etc. . . . drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the martyrs of Jesus."

And, lastly, what did Paul mean, Rom. 11: 13-25, when he wrote, that, as the Jews had for their unfaithfulness been set aside, and another witness brought into their place — so he certainly foresaw that that witness which superseded them, would likewise fail, and be set aside to make room for another?

When the Jews were owned of God as the keepers of His Scriptures (3: 2), where were the Gentiles? They were their oppressors in the world, as parts of the great statue of Dan. 2; but below them in the knowledge of everything that was of the true God; whether they lived under the four Beasts (Dan. 7), or in the outer parts and corners of the earth that lay outside of the Beasts. But they were shut out of Israel, and knew that it was so. Now (according to Eph. 2: 11-22), the believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, form one habitation of God through the Holy Spirit: that is a visible thing tangible to sense. Believers were "all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3: 28). Well, as this new witness (Paul writes to them), they needed to be warned (Rom. 11: 18) not to boast against Israel (v. 20, 21), and not to be high minded, but fear — and (v. 22) "behold the goodness and severity of [*lit.* sever-ing, cutting off] God: on them which fell sever-ing, but toward thee, goodness, if *thou continue in goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.*" I might be thought beside myself, if I ventured to express what this means. So in prudence I forbear. But what would you, reader, or men think, in a case such as I will put before you.

After twelve years of refusal to pay his rent a tenant, who had been spoiling the property, assumed that it was his own, and that he might break every clause in the lease, and yet maintain that he was a good tenant, and could not be turned out for violating all the *provisos* of the lease. The case is before the judge. What would human jury, and what would human judge say? Change now the case, and what are we to think of the so-called Reformation, and of the 1,200 years failure of the so-called church which preceded it? And what of the church which had set aside the Word of God — symbol of His authority — expression on the earth of His right to be heard by everyone? The Word not known, and the Holy Spirit not owned, how could its doctrines of grace and precepts of heavenly life be known or acted upon? How could even the salvation of an individual, upon the sure ground of the Word of God that cannot lie, be known? And what are we to think of protestants in 1874 differing from us in this judgment? While they are protestants, they assert, by their position, that the *church had failed entirely*. If so, God says, *it will be cut off*. If that (its failure) be not true, then let them doff the name of protestant, and don that of "*the church.*"

But farther, read Rom. 11: 25, where Paul's authoritative word comes forth: "For I would not,

brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part *is* happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."\* There is development in the evil; — progress. 1. While men slept; 2. Evil crept in, but put out; 3. The mystery of iniquity; 4. Evil superficial [as in 2 Tim. 3]; and lastly, open manifest rebellion. It was so in Israel, as Stephen said (Acts 7.)

\*The fulness of the Gentiles — the gospel as now preached, has its limits from God as to its preaching and reception by man through grace, though none as to its looking upon all sinners in mercy. Those limits reached, it may close. The full time of blessing for the Gentiles lies in another future dispensation. In v. 31 there is a faulty rendering which I would notice, viz. "that," the ninth word in the verse, should be transferred to after "mercy," which is the twelfth: "Even so have these also now not believed through [*lit. in*] your mercy, that they also may obtain mercy." The word "through" at the end of 31, should be "in."

And note here, that, while the union of believing Jew and Gentile together in Christ (made through the Spirit to be one body) had never been predicted in Jewish Scripture — the rejoicing of the Gentiles *with* and *under* Israel, had been fully revealed (Rom. 15: 7-12). Israel, as a nation, separated from the rest of the nations, is to be, and will be, the centre of blessing to the whole earth, when the knowledge of the glory of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

I close with this word: There were heavens and earth before these; and they perished in the deluge. But the heavens and the earth, which are now, are kept in store, reserved unto fire. *These* have been witnesses of strange things: such as — the Jews and the Gentile nations — Israel on the one hand, and the Roman kingdom on the other — combining to murder the Christ of God, Israel's Messiah, and to reject Him, Sender down of the Holy Spirit afterwards; and of the consequent dispersion from the land, of the Jews. And they will be witnesses, 2ndly, of two similar judgments of God upon the apostate. First, when the Lord, having saved all His own of the present period, will set aside wicked Christendom as having set aside His Spirit and the truth,\* and, after that, restore Israel as a whole; and, after the final apostasy described in Rev. 20: 7, 8 (in taking part openly with Satan, against God's Christ, when reigning), and the judgment consequent thereon (v. 9, 10), then, but not till then, these heavens and earth, also, will yield their places to new heavens and a new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness.

\* Is not this apostasy?