

Unity of the Church in Inspired History.

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Table of Contents

UNITY ACCORDING TO THE APOSTLE JOHN.....	1
UNITY IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES.....	4
UNITY OF THE CHURCH IN THE INSPIRED HISTORY.....	7

UNITY ACCORDING TO THE APOSTLE JOHN.

The great truth and privilege of unity appears prominently in the Gospel of John and in the Epistles of Paul; but it is viewed in a different way by these two eminent servants of the Lord, by each subordinately to the purpose which the inspiring Spirit of God had in the work given them respectively to do. In the writings of both, unity supposes and is based on the Lord's death, as in the gospel of grace and in the church of God. Without the accomplishment of redemption as well as the incarnation not one of these things could be. Every intelligent believer knows what a place the apostle of the Gentiles was led to assign to the work of the cross, whereby God was glorified, the door opened to Gentiles no less freely than to Jews, and the mystery of Christ and the church came into view. But it is no less plain in the Gospel of John, which only the present paper contemplates, though its main scope undoubtedly is to set forth Christ's personal glory, and the mission of the Holy Spirit to be here in His own on His departure to heaven.

Hence in John 10 the Lord explains His giving His life, as the Good Shepherd, for the sheep, in contrast with both the thief and the hireling (vers. 10-13). His laying down His life for the sheep He repeats in ver. 15 before He speaks of His other sheep, "1 not of this fold" (Judaism), but believers from among the Gentiles, whom also He must bring, as hearing His voice; "and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd" (ver. 16). Here is in this Gospel the first explicit announcement of unity for the flock answering to the one Shepherd. It is due to His glory and His love, to His person and His work. They are His own sheep, they hear His voice. To Him the porter opens, as He only is the Shepherd, Who calls them by name and leads them out. For He disowns the enclosure now condemned, that once had divine sanction; and when He put forth all His own, He goes before them, and the sheep follow Him. He is thus their way, protection, and warrant. A stranger they will not follow. It is not that they know every snare; but they know His voice (either in Himself or in whomsoever He speaks), not the voice of strangers. How simple and secure for him who hears!

Plain and all-important as this was, for it is the introduction of Christianity, it was a dark proverb when first spoken. "They understood not what things they were which he spoke to them." So it was when even before His Galilean ministry He spoke of raising up the temple of His body (John 2: 19-22). This the resurrection cleared up much, the coming of the Spirit what remained. But He adds a new and deeper figure with the utmost solemnity; He was "the door," not of the fold, not of Israel, but "of the sheep." All that claimed them *before* He pronounces thieves and robbers. *Are not all since yet* more blasphemously guilty? How awful for either! For the Father has given all execution of judgment to the Son on Whose rights they encroach, Whose title they in effect deny, as those that honour Him honour the Father also. The sheep hear Him, not these pretenders; and He is the door, so that if anyone enter in

(for it is sovereign grace), he shall be saved, and shall go in and shall go out, and shall find pasture. By Him (not the law) are salvation, liberty, and food. In contrast with the thief who comes to steal, kill, and destroy, Christ came that the sheep might have life, yea abundantly in Himself risen. What can hinder Him and His grace to His own?

Thus He presents Himself as the Good Shepherd, and His laying down His life for the sheep as its exercise and proof, in contrast with the hireling, whose own the sheep are not, seeing the wolf's approach, leaving the sheep, and fleeing; so that the wolf seizes and scatters them. Far from self He cares to the uttermost for the sheep, and repeats His gracious title (14), declaring their mutual knowledge according to the knowledge the Father had of Him and He of the Father, saying again, He lays down His life for the sheep. This introduces the Gentile sheep, who could not consistently with the divine ways be brought in, and form with the Jewish ones "one flock," till He died, rose, and ascended to heaven. Here however the Lord, though revealing and reiterating His devotedness in dying for His sheep, speaks with the authority of His person according to divine counsels. Nor is there a passage in scripture which more definitely claims the "one flock" for dependence on Himself, or which excludes more peremptorily the pretensions of men to appropriate this place of His, the only competent and worthy One, the centre of all.

Not for a moment is it overlooked that, in restoring Peter from his distressing fall, He made its completeness evident before chosen witnesses by charging him to feed His lambs, to shepherd or tend and feed the sheep. Nor again does one forget that the ascended Christ gave gifts to men, not apostles and prophets only as the foundation (Eph. 2, Eph. 4), but evangelists, and shepherds and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, etc., till we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. But He has in no way abnegated His own relations because He gives and sustains subordinates, each in his place to serve and do His will as laid down in His word. Nor is any notion less worthy than to relegate the "one flock, one Shepherd" only to the future and heaven. It is here that we need to recognise both, as He recognises them. It is now that the enemy subtly and persistently and everywhere tempts the saints to give up the truth of the relationship as a present fact, and the responsibility it involves on us to walk faithfully in accordance. It is revealed to act on our faith and practice as we are on the earth. In heaven by-and-by there will be no question, for that which is perfect will have come.

In John 11: 51, 52 is the next reference. Here it is the comment of the Holy Spirit on the words of Caiaphas to the Jewish council, not in parabolic form like our Lord's in John 10, but in terms void of figure. "Now this he said not of himself (ἄφ' ἑαυτοῦ); but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but that he should also gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad."

More than one weighty truth denied in Christendom we find here unambiguously. To the cynical sentiment of the wicked high priest God gave a turn of incomparable grace. Its adoption in apostate unbelief by the Jews in the politic sense of Caiaphas was the ruin of their place and their nation by the Romans. By-and-by mercy will prevail according to the oath sworn to Abraham, glorying over judgment. Jesus died for the nation, not to gather it into the church as some vainly imagine, nor assuredly to make it an object of irreversible woe like the Babylon of the seven hills, but to save and bless Israel as such at the end and for ever, beyond all that was ever tasted at the beginning under David and Solomon. For He Who died for them will come and reign over them, an infinitely greater than either (to cite a few decisive proofs, Isa. 4: 2-6, Isa. 9: 7, 8, Isa. 11).

But He should die, said the Spirit, for another purpose wholly distinct, and about to receive its

accomplishment in the very near future while He sits at God's right hand on high. The virtue of His death was then to be shown in the new and wondrous work of gathering together in one the scattered children of God. Till Jesus died and went to heaven and sent down the Holy Spirit, nothing of the kind was known or could exist. In Judaism as established of God provisionally (and He had no religious dealings of a public nature elsewhere), no such gathering was thought of. It was an elect nation responsible to be governed by His law; and they were bound to separation from all other nations. There He dwelt Who brought them forth from Egypt to this end, Jehovah their Lord.

Now that the Jews rejected Him, Who was not Messiah only but God, His death (their awful sin) became in God's ways the basis of an entirely different and an incomparably "better thing," the gathering together in one of God's scattered children. It is the church undoubtedly, but not viewed as "one body" which was revealed elsewhere. It is family union, in the closest connection with life eternal, the special truth prominent throughout the Gospel and the Epistles of John, the groundwork of communion with the Father and the Son, as we find explicitly there.

Severance between the Gentile believers and the Jewish was therein intolerable. Yet before the cross the barrier, it is notorious, subsisted as God's actual order; and Jesus while yet alive in flesh charged the twelve, saying, Go not into a way of the nations, enter not into any city of the, Samaritans. Risen from the dead, He expressly bids them disciple all the nations. For the children of God were to be gathered in virtue of His death into one, they "one flock," as He "one Shepherd." Fleshly distinctions, and outward ordinances, vanished away before the infinite efficacy of that death which blotted out the sins of all believers in the gospel, and by the grace which united them. John 15 is not here alleged; because in the teaching of the Vine and its branches the Lord does not set forth our oneness with Himself, but our need of dependence continual on Him in order to bear fruit. The necessity of communion with Him practically is the point, not the privilege of union.

But it is in John 17, where this great truth of family union has its fullest expression. And no wonder; for it is the Son pouring out His heart's desires about His own to the Father before His departure. There are three occasions in our Lord's utterance where oneness is asked for His saints, and each of these has its own distinctive character.

First, in ver. 11 He says, "Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one as we." It is for those who then surrounded Him (as is certain from vers. 12, etc.), about to preach, teach, and act with apostolic authority when, Himself gone on high, the new work of God had to see the light as the witness of Christ here below. He is not content with requesting that, as He was taking a new position as the glorified Man in heavenly glory, in virtue of His person and of His work (1-5), they might share it as far as could be, both before the Father (6-13) and before the world (14-21); He asks that in this they might be "one," further adding "even as we." This goes wonderfully far in His demand on the Father. And it was wonderfully answered in that unity of mind and purpose, of word and deed, of heart and service which characterised that holy band. Where and when was there anything to compare with it at any epoch before or since? It is the more striking in the twelve; for we heard of their marked differences, and their mutual jealousies, (alas! how like other saints and other servants of the Lord in all ages), which the presence of the Lord only checked but in no way excluded, as the Gospels faithfully tell us. See the same men when the Holy Spirit was given: how their words and ways by His power only evinced the activities and affections of the life they had in Christ! "Peter standing up with the eleven," they were now truly one. If the multitude of those that believed could be and is said to be of one heart and one soul, and earthly possessions only gave occasion for love, still more emphatically was it true of those God set first in the church."

Secondly, in ver. 20, 21 the Lord makes request not for these only, but also for those who believe on Him (Christ) through their word. This enlarges the sphere, and embraces the mass of the saints following, who received the gospel in the love of the truth. Here therefore, anticipating the world-wide testimony and its rich results, He says "that they may all be one, as thou Father [art] in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou didst send me." It is not at all so simple and absolute as in the first case, where divine power wrought to secure an end so all-important. The vast range of their mission was an astonishing witness to the grace that operated in the face of every hindrance, but the effect of the power was attenuated ere long and never so complete. It is the unity of grace, of Christians in the Father and the Son ("one in us"), rising above obstacles within and without through the power of what was revealed and of Him Who made the blessing theirs: to the world, which had known them so different in every way and now beheld them "one," a testimony far mightier than miracles however striking and numerous. And so it runs, "that the world may believe that thou didst send me." For this was what sounded out in every place-that the Father sent the Son as Saviour of the world, themselves its living example in their measure, all prejudice notwithstanding.

Thirdly, "the glory which thou hast given me I have given them, that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them even as thou lovedst me." Here, though the Lord gave the title then, He looks on to the glory and the glory displayed to the world. It is oneness in that day, and is a character without alloy, quite answering to that of the new Jerusalem in Rev. 21, where the world beholds the glory of the heavenly city, the Bride or Lamb's wife; not the mutuality of grace as now, but the order of glory, Christ in the glorified saints, and the Father in Christ. Hence then only will they be "perfected into one;" and then only will the world "know" that the Father sent the Son. For how else could those who were once sinners be in heavenly glory but by His Son sent for their salvation? How else, that the Father loved them even as He loved the Son, but by their manifestation with Him in glory? It is now a question of the world's "believing;" in that day the world will "know," because it will see the glory in which Christ and the church will shine together.

UNITY IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES.

It is however in the Epistles of the apostle to the Gentiles that we find fuller light, where unity rises (beyond the union of God's children however sure, sweet, and blessed, as seen in John's testimony), into the truths of God's habitation, and Christ's body. To be built together is close indeed; to be constituted an organic body, the one body of Christ, is yet more, the closest unity possible. Let us trace this new thing to His praise.

In the Epistle to the Romans unity is applied practically, after the gospel of God has been elaborately set forth in Rom. 1 - 8 and God's sovereign grace to all is in Rom. 9 - 11 conciliated with His special promises to Israel. The saints are exhorted to present their bodies a living sacrifice, not conformed to this age, nor with high thoughts but sobriety. "For as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function" (thus communion is taught, each fulfilling his own place in the one body, but not exceeding his measure), "so we the many are one body in Christ and severally members one of another."

Thus, in this Epistle as in all the N.T. and in the nature of things, God does not fail to make it evident that it is for the individual to repent and believe. We are reconciled to God and justified individually. Before the body of Christ was formed or revealed, the believer had through His blood the remission of sins, and was a son of God by faith in Christ Jesus. The work of redemption was now

accomplished; Christ had taken His seat at God's right hand; and the Holy Spirit came down to baptise all who received the gospel into one body, and to dwell in them as God's house. Then and there was the church of God formed. "The Lord was adding day by day such as should be saved together" (Acts 2: 47); and this united body was in due time called "the church" (Acts 5: 11).

The saints who believed through grace were no longer left as of old among their brethren after the flesh (Mal. 3: 16), however slowly they gave up habits and prejudices. They had now "their own company" (Acts 4: 23), outside Israel and of course the Gentiles. Their hearts, their prayers, their praises, rose up to God and His Anointed, Whose bondmen they were, bought with a price, and therefore to glorify God in their body. They were taken out of Israel and brought into the body of Christ by the uniting power of the Holy Spirit before they could explain its nature and character. But His descent they knew well, and that they had received Him. It was for Paul in due time to interpret the result and even to reveal it as bound up with Christ, given to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. The presence of the Spirit sent from heaven was their bond that made them one body, not their faith nor yet life which they had antecedently as individuals. They were no longer children of God scattered abroad, but gathered together in one; no longer invisible as units in the midst of the outwardly chosen people, but a corporate body on earth one with their Head in heaven, and as distinct from Jew as from Gentile (1 Cor. 10: 32).

In 1 Cor. 12 the apostle, before writing to the Roman saints, had discussed the constitutive principle on the side of the Holy Spirit's presence and action in the church, in the course of which the truth is stated as much above the Reformed systems or those who dissented from them, as above the ancient and so called catholic claims of Greece, Rome, or any others. His was the power that wrought in all the gifts varied as they were, some of which the Corinthians were singling out for ostentation, all of them given to exalt the Lord Jesus. That love, a way still more excellent, must animate and direct each in order to a right exercise of any gift is clearly shown in 1 Cor. 13; and that power is to be subject to the Lord's authority in the regulation of all is the aim of 1 Cor. 14.

In these distinct manifestations then the same Spirit distributes, the same Lord is served, the same God effectuates, by each for common profit. For as the one body has many members, and the many members are one body: so also, he boldly says, is "the Christ," the body and Head. How truly then is it "one body in Christ!" Of this unity the Holy Spirit now given and present is the power. "For also [besides working in each] in virtue of one Spirit were we all baptised into one, body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and we were all given to drink of one Spirit" (13). It is not new birth, still less water baptism, but the effect of the Spirit given when Jesus was glorified.

But in the body are many members, not one merely. The lower are as essential as the higher (15, 16). All are proper to the body; and God set the members each one of them in the body as it pleased Him. How blessed and conclusive to faith! "But if they all were one member, where the body? But now [they are] many members, yet one body;" and the superior cannot do without the humbler members: all have need of each other (21). Pride is as out of place as discontent. Nay, those that seem weaker are "necessary," rather than the higher (22); and the less honourable we clothe with more abundant honour, and our uncomely have more abundant comeliness" (23). "God tempered the body together, so that there might be no schism in the body" (24, 25). Hence if one member suffer, all suffer together; if one is honoured, all rejoice (26). Such is the true organisation of the church through the Spirit, without Whom it could not be.

Very important too are vers. 27, 28. The first proves that the local assembly (here primarily at Corinth) is Christ's body, and severally members. It represents in the locality that body, assuredly not

as independent of, but as one with, all on earth. Compare 1 Cor. 1: 2. All the saints here below were God's assembly, and each a member not of an but of *the* assembly, Christ's body. So the second demonstrates that if God set some in the assembly, it means not of course locally, but in it as a whole on earth. Certainly the apostles, etc., were not set in the Corinthian church or any other locality in particular. God sets the gifts in the assembly as a whole. They are, like the humblest Christians, members of the body; and the Holy Spirit acts therein by each as He pleases here below, for obviously it is no question of heaven. Thus, as the given Spirit abides with us for ever (John 14), it is unbelief to doubt that Christ's body exists here still, or that He can fail on His part. Let the members of Christ see that they be subject to the written word which alone secures the truth.

1 Cor. 14 furnishes, what was so necessary, the Lord's regulation of the assembly. For the exercise of gift therein (whatever the liberty where is the Spirit of the Lord) is not left to the licence, any more than the authority, of man. It is for His glory Who is the Second Man. The apostle therefore explains not only the relative value of the gifts, which men were apt to mistake, but the order that befits God's presence and promotes the edification of saints. What he wrote they were to recognise as the Lord's commandment. Now is all this, so due to His name, so full of enjoyment and growth and communion, is it obsolete? Is it not only lost for our joint walk, edification, and worship (15-17), but so fatally that we are not to seek thus to assemble, or to count on God's blessing in the only order He prescribes for the proper assembly of His own here below? Of course evangelising, or trading with individual gift, is not here in question.

In Eph. 2 the truth appears no less clearly, though viewed, on the side, not of the Spirit's presence and action to glorify the Lord, but of Christ's love to the church. Hence are omitted all references to such sign gifts as tongues, interpretations, miracles, healings. But nowhere is the unity of the church revealed more plainly, nowhere with greater elevation, or out of love so deep. Yet here as ever (and it is due to Christ and to God, to say nothing of the soul), the individual blessedness of saints is carefully treated before the church is so much as named, in the strongest contrast with the catholic system which makes all blessing hinge on the church to its own glory but really its shame. Now in Christ Jesus believing Gentiles, once far off, are become nigh by the blood of Christ. For He is our peace who made both (i.e. Jews and Gentiles) one, and broke down the middle wall of partition . . . that He might create the two in Himself into one new man, making peace, and might reconcile both in one body to God by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. So at the close of chapter 2 we are said to be built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, as the Ephesian saints also were being builded together for God's habitation in the Spirit. Thus God's house, like Christ's body, is shown to be the church, founded on redemption, and made good by the Spirit sent from heaven to that end.

Eph. 4 presents the Spirit's unity with great fulness before treating of the gifts: "one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, Who is over all, and through all, and in you [or, us] all" (4-6). Diversity follows in the gifts, which are not simply powers here as in 1 Cor. 12, but persons endowed for special ends in Christ's love to His own. His ascension is the declared starting-point after His wondrous humiliation and its fruit. "But to each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, unto ministerial work, unto edifying of the body of Christ, until we all attain," etc. This is unmistakable if we are simple, deriving both the one body and the several gifts from Christ on high after His victory over Satan to our deliverance, and that work of redemption which has perfectly glorified God even as to sin and our sins, so that His love can flow to the uttermost. Thus

and therefore is Christ set as Head over all things to the church His body. What a glorious place this gives to not only the church but those gifts, the exercise of which constitutes ministry of the word!

Beyond controversy the foundation gifts are the apostles and prophets. The basis of N.T. truth they so well laid that there was no room for their continuance, still less for the delusion of their revival. The others, evangelists as well as pastors and teachers, are given "till we all attain," etc. Do we wish better security than the written word? Does unbelief tempt us to think that the one body admits of change without sin, or that the gifts of Christ fail, so that we need human imitations to supply their place? Do we believe that Christ's body abides on earth from the first, as that only to which we belong wherever we dwell, according to which we are called to walk and in nothing else? Do we believe that He has given evangelists to win the unconverted, or pastors and teachers to tend and feed His sheep as truly now as on the day of Pentecost?

The Epistle to the Colossians teaches no other doctrine, though its design is to assert the glory of Christ the Head rather than to develop the nature and privileges of the body. Indeed the special aspect of the mystery made known to the Gentile saints is Christ in them the hope of glory *i.e.* on high; the converse of what the O.T. prophets teach, Christ the glory of His people Israel with all the nations blessed but subordinate. A marked warning is against not holding the Head from Whom all the body, being supplied and knit together through the joints and bands, increaseth with the increase of God (Col. 2: 19). Heathen philosophy and judaising ordinances were the dangers; and so they are to this day. Christ, not merely as Lord, nor yet as Saviour of sinners, but as Head of the body, is the object of faith, Christ, ever working for the best good of all the body, not only through such a gift as Paul, but through the less considerable and marked, "the joints and bands" (cf. Eph. 4: 16). Thus was "all the body" to increase with the increase of God.

What a contrast with the increase of man when the spread of profession became multitudinous! "In the distress of the battle of Tolbiac Clovis [still a Pagan] loudly invoked the God of Clotilda and the Christians; and victory disposed him to hear with respectful gratitude the eloquent Remigius, bishop of Rheims, who forcibly displayed the temporal and spiritual advantages of his conversion. The king declared himself satisfied of the truth of the catholic faith; and the political reasons which might have suspended his public profession were removed by the devout or loyal acclamations of the Franks, who showed themselves alike prepared to follow their heroic leader to the field of battle or to the baptismal font . . . The new Constantine was immediately baptised with three thousand of his warlike subjects; and their example was imitated by the remainder of the gentle barbarians, who in obedience to the victorious prelate adored the cross which they had burnt, and burnt the idols which they had formerly adored" (Gibbon's D.& F. chap. xxxviii. A. D. 496).

The departure of the ancient systems into sanctioned error and evil is no doubt true. The Reformed Protestant systems began without any intelligence of the church of God; the Dissenters split off with less sense of it if possible. If we feel for the Lord's injured honour, and if we love the church, are we not bound to purge ourselves from the vessels to dishonour, as in a great house? What can we do but humble ourselves before God for that ruin in Christendom which we have all shared, and fall back on all that is open to us to obey in this evil day? We are sanctified by the Spirit to obedience: the divine word is the rule, and He is the yet abiding power. We are here and always to follow the Lord, not men. Are we to slight the organisation of Christ's body and His gifts for either the old devices or the new inventions around us? I trust not.

UNITY OF THE CHURCH IN THE INSPIRED HISTORY.

In full accord with what has been shown from the Gospel of John and from the Pauline epistles are the facts presented in the Acts of the Apostles. The disciples were born of God and had genuine faith. From deep anguish they had joy in their risen Lord. But as yet they were awaiting "the promise of the Father, which [said he] ye have heard of me. For John baptised with water; but ye shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1: 4, 5). They had not yet His personal presence so as to make them one. They were living units, but did and could not yet possess the promised unity. Saints of God individually, they were soon in virtue of one Spirit to be baptised into one body, Christ's body (1 Cor. 12: 13). Meanwhile they all gave themselves, Mary etc. with them, to persevering prayer.

When the day of Pentecost was a-fulfilling (Acts 2), the wondrous answer came. The Holy Spirit, attended by significant tokens, filled them all; and they began to speak with other tongues. Devout Jews from every nation were then dwelling at Jerusalem, who could recognise their own languages in Galilean lips telling out the mighty things of God, not in creation now, but in redemption. Nor was there only the church of God but the gospel of grace. For to those pricked in heart by the truth preached and saying, "What shall we do?" the word was, "Repent ye, and be baptised each of you in (or on) the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (ver. 38). Thus was the blessing to go on, as it began; the saintly status precedes the grace which established unity and gifts. Repentance unto life, and washing away of sins in baptism, were followed by not gifts merely but the Holy Spirit given.

Thus were added about 3,000 souls that day; and they persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in the breaking of bread and the prayers. It was not a human or voluntary association, but a divine institution of unequalled character, the one body of Christ.* "And the Lord was adding together [the true text] daily those that should be saved" (cf. ver. 47 with 44). Baptism was the mark or sacramental badge for the individual; the Lord's Supper, for the communion of saints as one body (1 Cor. 10: 16, 17).

* "Divisions among Christians" (Ward & Co.) is a work apparently by a theorist and representing only the anonymous writer's ideas, though it may contain a measure of truth. chiefly applied negatively if one may judge by extracts; for I know no friend that has even seen it.

But beyond controversy the article of the church stood, not on the truth of justification by faith, but on the presence and action of the Holy Spirit. When this was a new thing, grace gave plain, characteristic, and irrefragable proofs. These do not seem continued beyond the apostolic era and the close of the N.T. canon, which supplied henceforward the weightier attestation of permanent authority in God's word. At first, as Christ, so also His own, had favour with all the people; for unselfish love, happiness, and holiness, all hanging on the name of the crucified but exalted Jesus, told on conscience and heart, to say nothing of wonders and signs.

But as the work grew, the Jewish rulers became exasperated and threatened in vain; for with great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. Lying was sternly judged "within" as lying to the Holy Spirit, for God was there as never before (Acts 5: 4). Signs were yet more abundant subsequently, as before the place wherein they were assembled shook in answer to their praying. Yea, their baffled religious adversaries might imprison or beat the apostles, but what could be done with men rejoicing to be counted worthy of dishonour for the Name? And every day in the temple and at home they ceased not preaching and teaching Jesus the Christ. The overwhelming appeal of Stephen to the Jews, always resisting the Holy Spirit as their fathers did, drew out their hatred unto blood; and all the saints were scattered save the apostles. But

thereon the free action of the Spirit in the work of the gospel went forward outside the Jews. Even Saul, who had consented in his blind fury to Stephen's murder, was called as apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 9), and pre-eminently became also minister of the church, whose union with Christ was conveyed in our Lord's words at his conversion, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest."

Now no one disputes that the saints assembled at first in private houses to remember the Lord in His supper, the centre of their worship. It was expressly κατ' οἶκον "at home," in contrast with the temple (Acts 2: 46); and there would they teach the disciples, if not preach more openly (ver. 42). Ere long, even in Jerusalem, they might need a hundred upper chambers instead of that one which sufficed before Pentecost. Unity does not at all depend on all assembling within a single apartment. This would make it material. It is really in the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence coming together ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ (1 Cor. 11: 20) admits of as many localities as suited the convenience of saints dwelling sometimes in all the quarters of an extensive city. No matter how numerous the assemblages might be, scripture (i.e. God's mind) regards the saints as the church met together for the same purpose. One Spirit, not theirs but God's, created and maintained the unity for the manifestation of God's glory in Christ. Hence we never hear of "churches" but solely of "the church" in a city as in Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, etc.; though we read of "the churches" of Judea, Galatia, Macedonia, Asia, etc.

The notion however of "churches" only on earth, contrasted with "the church" in heaven, is not only unfounded but opposed to the word of God. For this reveals, not alone the fact of local assemblies up and down the earth, but that the saints there are members of one body, in which they are set by God according to His will for His glory. That some are no longer alive but gone to be with Christ in no way clashes with the living fact; for the Spirit came down here to establish the unity. Even among men the regiment abides the same, though individual soldiers are there no more. Independency is therefore the direct negation of that unity of the saints in one body here below, throughout manifested once, which each and all are responsible to manifest, though it be now manifested only by few. There was but one communion on earth according to the Lord's will and the apostles' teaching. A Christian (when godly discipline forbade not) was member of the church everywhere; a pastor and teacher was Christ's gift wherever he might be. "God set" gifts in *the* church. Scripture recognises no such thought as membership or gift in a church. Barnabas and Simeon, Niger and Lucius, Manaen and Saul, laboured together in Antioch; but so did such as visited Jerusalem or any other place. Intercommunion was the invariable rule, and liberty, not to say responsibility, of ministry in love. It was the right of Christ, not man's.

Undoubtedly there were also local charges, elders and deacons, in due time and place. In Jerusalem the "seven" were looked out by the multitude of the disciples, and appointed by apostolic laying on of hands, Scripture is silent how the elders there (Acts 11: 30, Acts 15: 2-29) entered on their duties; but we know from Acts 14: 23 that apostles chose them for the disciples, or an apostolic delegate like Titus (Titus 1: 5) established them where the apostle could not act. In no case was there popular election of elders. It was a task too delicate and difficult for the saints as a company; and it demanded apostolic authority direct or indirect. As the disciples contributed their money, it was fitting that they should look out dispensers in whom they confided; it was for apostles or their delegates to choose overseers or presbyters, to whom the rest could give no authority.

The apostles derived authority as well as gift from Christ, the source of both. As Christ conferred the highest and widest authority on the apostles, so did they appoint presbyters or elders and deacons in their local places respectively; the one as a spiritual charge, the other in temporal things, as is fully explained by the apostle, not to the assembly, but to Timothy in the third chapter of his first Epistle. One sees in the quotation which Eusebius draws (H. E. iii. 23) from Clem. Alex. how far the truth was

lost thus early; for how absurd to imagine the apostle John recurring to lots! a mode adopted before the Holy Spirit was given (Acts 1), as Chrysostom rightly acknowledges.

But local charge is in principle distinct from the gifts which the ascended [head of the body] gave for the perfecting of the saints. Never do elders or deacons appear on any such ground. For the gifts flow direct from Christ, and are for His body wherever it may be. Nor does 1 Cor. 12 differ in this from Eph. 4, or Rom. 12 from Col. 2. And for this reason what unspeakable mercy to the saints! For the supply of those gifts which are of all moment depends on His grace and faithful care Who can no more fail now that He is on high, than when He came down to accomplish redemption for God's glory. In none of these, scriptures can we restrain the church or the body to a local assembly, though a local assembly was wholly wrong if it did not represent it. The assembly on earth as a whole is contemplated; and in it, manifestly one body, the gifts were set. Hence the apostle treats it as no less visible than Jews or Greeks (1 Cor. 10: 32).

This is the unity which is supposed in the very weighty scripture of 1 Tim. 3: 15. "But if I delay, that thou mayest know how to conduct oneself in God's house, which is a living God's assembly, pillar and support of the truth." Invisibility is out of the question. Responsible manifestation is the essence of what the apostle has before him and urgently presses. Nor would any other thought have been entertained, but for the practical ruin which so soon ensued, and the subsequent and deeper failure when the truth got swamped under tradition which was but precepts of men. Then began the desire to plead an invisible aggregate of saints within a visible mixed multitude, as if the church were only another Israel. The truth rather is that the church has departed from manifesting its original unity, according to the sad history of all the varied trials of man under responsibility here below. Who can see independent churches in the decree of Acts 15? Who can limit "all the flock," or "the church of God" in Acts 20: 28, to the city of Ephesus? The R. Catholics have abused the fact of the church as a visible unity everywhere to their own mere majority and the grossest sectarianism, heterodoxy, and idolatry. This does not justify Protestants in denying responsible and holy unity according to God's institution, or claiming license to set up churches independent one of another.

Are we then helplessly, hopelessly, bound by a chain of sin, either individually, or in our corporate place? If we turn away, as we are commanded, from those that create divisions and occasions of falling (Rom. 16: 17), is there no way by grace to stand approved when not merely schisms but sects appear (1 Cor. 11: 18, 19)? God has answered this very difficulty in 2 Tim. 2: 19-21, which contemplates a state of disorder beyond rectifying. "Howbeit the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his, and, Let everyone that nameth the name of the Lord depart from unrighteousness. Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some unto honour and some unto dishonour. If one therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, meet for the master's use, prepared to every good work."

Before the church began, the Lord had given the great assuring resource for the darkest day: "where two or three are gathered together unto my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18: 20). In the brightest day no privilege more pregnant of blessing. We cannot expect all saints to recognise their relationship as members, and to refuse every body save the one body of Christ; but we can believe and act in faith ourselves. This is not a sect, but the way to be kept from it, while we look to the Lord, and own the ruin in loving sorrow. For without a real share in Christ's sense of the dishonour done thus to His name, knowing the church's privilege, and seeking to realise it, only ends in pride, evil, and worse confusion.

We are free, not to say bound, to remember Him in the breaking of the bread, but only in the unity of His body, and therefore receiving all that are His, save where His discipline intercepts. "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12: 30). Undoubtedly we need the Spirit of God to guide us aright in the midst of the scatterings and perplexities of Christendom; but we have Him dwelling in us, that living in the Spirit we may walk in the Spirit, not only as individuals but keeping His unity in the bond of peace. Obedience, according to the word of God, is the safe-guard of holiness in every way: to this we are sanctified by the Spirit.

W. K.