

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

*A Treatise
on the Nature, Powers, Ordinances, Discipline,
and Government of the Christian Church*

by

James Bannerman, D.D.



THE BANNER OF TRUTH TRUST

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Publisher's Note

Foreword

THE church in the West faces a very tough future. In America, while church attendance remains high compared to Europe, the de-Christianisation of society is happening at an aggressive pace. In Europe, the church is struggling even for bare existence in some places. Everywhere, the anti-Christian atmosphere becomes more hostile. Same-sex marriage is the cultural and legislative wedge that would appear to guarantee that the church will be socially marginalized, if not actually persecuted, in the coming years.

Like Paul in the first century, we face a transitional point in history. As he contemplated the end of the apostolic era, where the men directly appointed by Christ to lead the church were passing away, so we contemplate the death of a world where the church was at least a familiar part of the scenery. In the future, society may well not regard the church as having any obviously legitimate role; and the church will have no generic capital in the wider culture upon which she will be able to rely. Biblical illiteracy, indifference, and even active hostility are likely to be the orders of the day. At such a time, it is important to reflect upon priorities for the church, for this is not a moment for muddled thinking or for expending energy on things which do not count.

Paul laid plans for the transition from apostolic to post-apostolic Christianity in his Pastoral Epistles. In 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, he laid out a normative pattern for the church in the post-apostolic era. At a basic level, the church needed a stable, orthodox doctrinal testimony (a form or pattern of sound words) and a form of government, overseers and deacons. In short, Paul saw that the most important practical thing the church needed was a practical doctrine of the church herself. To survive after the death of the apostles, the church needed to be governed well in accordance with agreed doctrinal standards.

The same is true for the church today. As we head into a world very similar to Paul's own context, a world of pluralist religion where Christianity is regarded with intellectual and moral suspicion, we need a solid grasp of what the church actually is and how she should be governed. The New Testament places the church at the centre of its practical vision of the Christian life and at the heart of the Great Commission. Thus, a clear understanding of the Bible's teaching on the church should be a priority for all Christian ministers, elders, deacons, and indeed informed lay people. Only when one knows what the church is can one full grasp what her task is and what tools the Lord has provided for the accomplishment of that task.

It is with this in mind that The Banner of Truth Trust has reprinted one of the key historic texts in Protestant, Presbyterian ecclesiology: James Bannerman's *The Church of Christ*. Bannerman, along with others such as Robert Smith Candlish and William Cunningham, was one of the finest ministerial minds in the generation of Scottish churchmen who lived through the events of the Disruption of 1843. Then, approximately one third of the ministers of the Church of Scotland left to form the Free Church of Scotland over the issue of patronage, or the question of who had the right to call a minister to serve a congregation: the patron or the congregation itself. The point may now seem for many to be somewhat antiquarian but it goes to the heart of the issue of ecclesiology: the nature and administration of church power. Bannerman's later writings on ecclesiology thus emerged from his own very practical experience of ecclesiastical debates and discussions.

The Church of Christ contains the lectures which Bannerman gave each year at New College, Edinburgh, the pre-eminent educational foundation of the Free Church. They were thus intended to be for students who were looking to enter the ministry. While Practical Theology today often deals with the homiletic aspects of the theological curriculum, it has also become an umbrella for anything pertaining to the practicalities of the daily life of a minister. Thus, courses in counselling, management theory, and even financial competence often populate the PT course load at seminary. In Bannerman's day, however, the discipline was much more narrowly focused, as these lectures indicate. For him, the nature of Practical

Theology as a discipline arose out of the consideration of the church as an act of God, with Christ as her head and her source of power. Thus, the modern reader approaching this text and being told it teaches practical theology might well come away bewildered: the content is far more exegetical, systematic, and doctrinal than the Practical Theology curriculum of most, if not all, seminaries in the twenty-first century.

Yet Bannerman's approach is surely correct. The church is not a response to the grace of God but an act of the grace of God. The structure of the *Heidelberg Catechism*, placing the church in the section on 'Grace,' makes this point with implicit power. Calvin, in his use of the language of motherhood, articulates the matter memorably in *Institutes* IV.I.i (Beveridge translation):

I will begin with the Church, into whose bosom God is pleased to collect his children, not only that by her aid and ministry they may be nourished so long as they are babes and children, but may also be guided by her maternal care until they grow up to manhood, and, finally, attain to the perfection of faith. What God has thus joined, let not man put asunder (*Mark* 10:9): to those to whom he is a Father, the Church must also be a mother. This was true not merely under the Law, but even now after the advent of Christ; since Paul declares that we are the children of a new, even a heavenly Jerusalem (*Gal.* 4:26).

The church is God's creature, not the invention of human beings. Indeed, the analogy between creation and the church which Paul draws in *Colossians* 1:15-20 makes this clear. And if the church is God's creature, then the message she speak, the rules she lives by, and the power she exerts are to be regulated by God and thus by God's word. Hence, Bannerman's approach to *practical* theology is, first and foremost, *theological* because it has to do with God's revelation.

Bannerman's work is a very thorough treatment of ecclesiology which repays careful reading and reflection. It is worth noting, however, that at the very heart of the work lies the vital question of church power, its nature and extent. It is perhaps not overbold to say that mistakes made on this particular question will tend to vitiate the understanding of the church as a whole. Consider these questions: In what does the ordained ministry consist? Should the church

micro-manage the lives of her members? How does the church relate to the state? To what extent should the church campaign as a church for wider political or social causes? Is the church to be an agent for the transformation of society as a whole? What tools does the church have for making disciples and, if necessary, for disciplining them? These are just a few of the questions which can only be answered correctly once the matter of the nature and extent of the church's power has been settled.

Bannerman's answer to the nature of the church's power is straightforward: as Christ is head of the church, he is the source of her power. Because he is the source of her power, he is also determinative of the character of her power. That power is ministerial and spiritual and is exercised in three connected areas: the doctrinal, the sacramental, and the disciplinary. These are, of course, three marks that many in the Reformed tradition ascribe to the church: the preaching of the word, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the appropriate implementation of discipline.

A grasp of these basic principles helps to clarify a lot of confusion. First, if the church's power is spiritual, then the notion that the civil magistrate should be used to coerce belief is shown to involve a terrible confusion of categories. To put it bluntly, the sword cannot be used to impose Christianity. Had the church understood that throughout history, much bloodshed could have been avoided. Today, while the stakes may not be as high, this principle should be a sobering truth to those who use the language of 'Christian nation' in too glib a fashion. Churches are Christian; it is hard to see how a nation might qualify as such.

Second, these principles focus the mind of the church on her primary task: making disciples. Of course, Christianity makes a difference to how people behave in their neighbourhoods and in their workplaces. It no doubt shapes how they think about voting at election time. It impacts their response to the great social issues of the day. But the church as an institution is not directly focused on any of these things. Her task is to proclaim Jesus Christ and him crucified and to nurture believers and to bring them to maturity in the faith. In a time of scarce resources, knowing where to focus the church's energy is vital. A sound ecclesiology, which connects the church's

power to the church's mission, is a prerequisite to correct priorities.

Third, these principles highlight the tools for achieving this discipleship: word, sacraments, and discipline. There is a vast number of books written on how to grow the church, how to 'do' church (a ghastly phrase, if ever there was one), and how to disciple people. Some years ago, I sat on a panel with a free-will Baptist pastor and a number of mega-church pastors. When asked by the audience about matters pertaining to church policy, myself and the free-will Baptists found ourselves unexpectedly on the same side. Our response to any question was first to go back to the New Testament principles of word, sacrament and discipline. The mega-church pastors all seemed to offer versions of a different refrain: yes, we see what the Bible says, but we have tried these other approaches, and they seem to work better. The problem, of course, is that such responses are ultimately pragmatic and operate with a malleable definition of the means of grace. One might also add that they tended to be spectacular and expensive. The ordinary means of grace, word and sacrament enriched by prayer, are inexpensive, available to all, and entirely consonant with the New Testament vision of the church.

I doubt that any reader will agree with everything Bannerman has to say. Baptists and Congregationalists will repudiate his Presbyterianism. Many Presbyterians will now struggle with his advocacy of the Establishment Principle which seems today at best a pious hope, at worst a hang-over from an outdated and now impractical model of church and state. Yet the great thing about the book is that it will stimulate the reader to reflect on the nature of the church in a profoundly biblical and historically sensitive way. At a point in history when the church in the West is finding herself for the first time in 1,500 years to be marginal often unwelcome, clear thinking on the nature and purpose of the church is vital. I do not think there is a better way to sharpen one's thinking on these matters than thoughtful and deep reflection upon this work of James Bannerman.

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June 2014.

Editor's Preface

THIS treatise is made up of the Lectures delivered by Dr. Bannerman during each Winter Session of the New College to the students of the fourth year. The MS. was left by him in a very perfect state, the course having been fully written out from the first, and the changes and additions made of late years being, so far as the Editor is aware, confined to matters of detail. The completeness and symmetry of the plan on which the Lectures were arranged, and the intimate relation of the several parts to the whole which they make up, left room for little modification in preparing the work for the press, save in the way of omitting recapitulations and a few purely academic allusions. In no case has any freedom been used with the Author's language which could in the slightest degree alter or obscure his meaning. Notes and references added by the Editor are marked with brackets.

The following analysis of the work may be here inserted, for which the Editor is indebted to Professor Rainy:—

In this treatise the principles and leading applications of the doctrine of the Church are discussed; the Church being here considered chiefly as it becomes visible, and exercises definite appointed functions; and the fundamental principles laid down being those commonly received among Scottish Presbyterians. The importance of the topic, and its eminently practical character, will not be disputed. Questions such as those regarding the sense in which the Church is a Divine institution,—regarding the powers entrusted to her, the principles on which they are to be exercised, and the virtue to be ascribed to her action in the use of them,—the various controversies regarding offices, discipline, sacraments, schisms, and the like,—these are not only important at all times, but at the present time they become continually more urgent. It will perhaps also be admitted, that those who have to handle them do not always give evidence of

mature thought and of a consistent scheme of principles. Hence, the difficulties necessarily arising from conflicts of opinion are aggravated by those which result merely from perplexity and confusion. The eminently clear and connected treatment which the subject here receives, will therefore, it is believed, reward the attention of careful readers. Even those who belong to other schools, and do not concur with the Author in his conclusions, may benefit by the specimen here given of a coherent scheme of doctrine, and by the obligations which it may be felt to impose on any one who sets forth a counter scheme.

The arrangement of the course is simple; and a very brief explanation with respect to it will suffice. In contemplating the Church, it is natural to ask, first, under what authority this Society has been constituted, what is its essential nature, what its peculiar characteristics. These topics accordingly are first taken up; and they naturally lead to the inquiry, how this Society stands related to the other great and permanent forms of human fellowship, and, in particular, to the State. Next, the functions of the Church come into view. But before entering upon these in detail, a preliminary set of questions present themselves as necessary to be determined. In discharging her functions, the Church professes to exercise some kind of power and authority. But much depends on the view that may be taken of the nature of this power, and of the efficacy to be ascribed to it. The second general head, therefore, is occupied with the subject of Church power,—its source, nature, limits, and ends. Nor is this all; for it is an old, and not in all respects an easy question, in whom, *i.e.* in what members of the Church, this power has its primary residence and seat. The discussion, therefore, of the question touching the primary subject of Church power follows, and closes the second head. The principles so far established have next to be applied in detail to the various kinds of matter in and about which the Church exercises her powers, and her specific rights and duties with respect to each have to be considered. These matters may be reduced to three heads: Doctrine, Ordinances or Worship, and Discipline. Each of these heads involves a variety of subordinate points. The second of them, Worship, is especially comprehensive. The Church discharges important functions with respect to the various parts of worship, the seasons for it, and the agents who ought to conduct it; and, in

particular, the peculiar institutions called Sacraments give rise to a large class of questions which require separate and detailed consideration,—so various have been the apprehensions of men concerning their nature, and the office of the Church in connection with them. These topics, then, constitute the material of the third general head. Finally, the question regarding the persons to whom the exercise of Church power ought to be committed, leads into the discussion of the Scriptural form of Church government. This constitutes the fourth general head, and completes the scheme.

It would not be easy, it is believed, to point to any one work in which this class of subjects is treated so comprehensively, and with the unity and thoroughness which characterize these Lectures. In the older systems, the head *De Ecclesiâ* comprehended topics all of which fall within Dr. Bannerman's scheme; but only some of them received full and satisfactory treatment. Separate works of a more exhaustive kind, such as the *Politica Ecclesiastica* of Voetius, did not cover, nor profess to cover, the whole ground. In modern German writings the discussion of these matters, though often very learned and able, will not be regarded in this country as satisfactory, nor even very helpful as regards the questions which are most important for us. The condition of the German Churches is not favourable to an equal and searching survey of the whole field. Moreover, in their Theological systems, the topics, so far as discussed, are taken up partly under Systematic and partly under Practical Theology, and the treatment suffers from this dispersion. In our own country the discussion of Church questions has been extremely active, and it is likely to continue. Many able writings have appeared, bearing on larger or smaller sections of the field. Without wishing to detract from their value and ability, it may perhaps be fairly said that the objects which the writers had in view have generally led them to spend their strength chiefly on those questions which are matters of exciting discussion, and to pass by others, more recondite perhaps, or less debated, but well entitled to a place in a full survey of this great subject. A comparison of the topics dealt with in the volumes of Litton, or of Palmer and Wordsworth (to name representatives of different theological schools), with those comprised in this volume, will illustrate the remark. From the Presbyterian point of view, Dr. Bannerman's

work has of course a special interest and value. It is a fresh statement of our fundamental principles in their application to the whole range of questions; and it is carried through with an eye, not only to the permanent conditions of the discussion, but also to the form which recent controversies have assumed.

The Editor's best acknowledgments are due to the Very Rev. Principal Candlish for his kindness in undertaking the Preface to this work. He wishes also to express his warm thanks to the Rev. John Laing, Acting Librarian, New College, for the labour and pains bestowed by him upon the Index, and for occasional help in verifying the few references, to identify which it was necessary to travel beyond the shelves of Dr. Bannerman's own library.

In thus ending the task entrusted to him, the Editor cannot refrain from saying how very greatly the impression, strong as that was, left upon his mind by these Lectures, when he first had the privilege of listening to them a few years ago in the New College of Edinburgh, has been strengthened by a closer study of their contents. He has been led to appreciate, as he never did before, the depth and thoroughness and extent of a learning that never encumbers its possessor, that shows itself not in any purposeless parade of quotation and authority, but in the unflinching grasp taken of the whole question at issue in all its bearings, in the clearness and decision with which all that is central and essential in the controversy is singled out and separated from what is subordinate or irrelevant, in the ease and certainty with which the argument is wielded. He has been taught afresh and more intelligently to recognise the union of high and rare qualities, not too often brought to bear together on this field of Theological discussion,—the unvarying fairness and courtesy to controversial opponents, the calm, judicial wisdom with which evidence is sifted and reasonings are summed up, the power and effect with which great leading principles of Divine truth are grasped, and established, and vindicated in their right to rule the controversy, the masterly precision and clearness of insight with which the lines are drawn round some of the most delicate and difficult questions in all Theology, the reverence for the Word of God. But of these things it may be more fitting that others should speak.

These Volumes will find acceptance, the Editor believes, with all who are competent to form a judgment regarding them, and who, whether agreeing or not with the positions maintained by the Author, love to see a great subject worthily handled. They will have a more powerful interest still, he is well assured, to many now scattered throughout almost all parts of Christendom, who trace some of their strongest and highest impulses in the work of the ministry to the Chair in the New College which Dr. Bannerman filled so long, who learned there, perhaps for the first time, something of the worth and meaning of Theology, and of the spirit in which the study of it ought to be pursued, who have cause to remember not only the weight and power of his public teaching, but words of wise and ready counsel and deeds of efficient help in times of private difficulty and questioning, to whom the written argument of these Volumes seems almost to carry a personal influence, and to whose ears the music of its grave and stately eloquence is deepened by the memories of a voice and a bearing not often equalled among men.

D. DOUGLAS BANNERMAN.
Abernyte House, Inchtute,
October 1868.

Preface by Principal Candlish¹

I HAVE been asked to introduce these Volumes to the Christian public, and I gladly consent to do so. They do not indeed require any introduction outside of themselves; nor, if they did, could mine be of much avail, for I cannot pretend to anything like such a systematic and scholarly acquaintance with the department of Theology to which they belong, as might give me a right to speak with authority. The book, therefore, as to its intrinsic merits, must speak for itself, so far as I am concerned; it will do so all the better for the brief analysis of its contents which Dr. Rainy has furnished. I may be allowed, however, to say that, whether exhaustively or suggestively, Dr. Bannerman seems to me to have mastered the entire field, not only in the way of a general survey, but in the way of insight also into all details.

Exhaustively or suggestively, I have said; for these would seem to be two different methods of professorial prelection. Of the two, the suggestive method is clearly the preferable one. To send students away under the impression that they have got all that needs to be got for solving every problem and settling every question in the branch of study to which they have been giving one or two years of attendance on professorial lectures, is a serious mistake on the part of the Chair, and a sore evil to its victims,—discovered often only when it is too late to have it remedied. No such fault can be found with these Lectures. But a special good can be found in them. They are exhaustive, in the right way of exhaustively mapping out the entire ground to be surveyed minutely and particularly; while at the same time they are not exhaustive, but the reverse, as regards the actual surveying of the ground thus mapped out. They are suggestive,

¹ Robert Smith Candlish (1806–73) was the minister of St George's Free Church of Scotland, Edinburgh and succeeded William Cunningham as Principal of New College, Edinburgh in 1862.

and highly suggestive, in themselves and in their references, on all questions of detail, while at the same time they bring out clearly and fully the entire doctrine as a whole, and the bearing of these detailed questions upon the entire doctrine as a whole.

But I may be allowed a few words about the Author, if not about this work of his.

I can testify, with the utmost confidence, to his being competent, and admitted on all hands to be competent, to give a fair and full representation of the theory of Church polity, all but unanimously adopted in Scotland at and after the Reformation,—not under influences from without, such as regal supremacy or papal dictation; but inwardly and directly from the study of the Divine Word, and the honest application of its principles to the problems of Divine Providence as they came up. For that is what we claim to be the characteristic of our Scottish Reformation,—that in all the departments of doctrine, worship, and government, it was no mere modification of the Romish system, in accommodation to altered circumstances, but a reconstruction of the Divine plan, freshly based on the old foundation.

For the exposition of the doctrine of the Church upon that footing, and in that view, Dr. Bannerman was eminently qualified. He was a close and thorough biblical student; and he was an authority in ecclesiastical history and law.

I can recall his first public and prominent service rendered to the Church in the years 1839–41, when it fell to him mainly to conduct a case of heresy, involving very delicate and difficult points in Theology. And I can recall also his valuable service rendered in connection with the gravest question raised in the course of our 'ten years' conflict,'—that of the Strathbogie interdicts. In both instances Dr. Bannerman won for himself the full confidence and esteem of the whole Church; and it was felt to be only a suitable acknowledgment of his worth and his work when he was called to occupy the professorial Chair.

Of his manner of occupying that Chair, I need not speak. But I must express the deep feeling of regret with which all parties in the Church received the tidings of his death, at the very time when he was coming forward more than his special professorial engagements had previously permitted, in the discussion of matters widely and deeply

affecting the general interests of Christian peace and union in the Church catholic, as well as in our own branch of it. In that view, one is constrained to wonder, and stand in awe, and say, 'It is the Lord.'

R. S. C.

Introduction

THE Bible is a revelation from God of truths immediately bearing on the state by nature, and the recovery by divine grace, of individual men. But it is more than that: it is also a revelation of truths bearing on the character and condition of men formed into a society of believers, and constituting one collective body, holding together the faith of Christ. The difference between these two aspects in which the Bible may be regarded, marks the point of transition from the departments of Apologetical and Doctrinal Theology to the department on which we are now about to enter,—that, namely, of the nature, powers, and constitution of the Christian Church. To individual men, whether in a state of sin or a state of salvation, the Bible is a communication from God, telling them of truths and doctrines, through the belief and renewing influence of which they may individually be recovered from the spiritual ruin of the fall, and made partakers, under the Divine Spirit, of complete and everlasting redemption. But to the body of believers, not individually, but collectively, the Bible is also a communication from God, telling them of truths and doctrines, through the right appreciation of which they may be fashioned into a spiritual society, with divinely authorized powers and ordinances and office-bearers,—an outward and public witness for God on the earth, and an instrument for the edification of the people of Christ.

Perhaps there are few who confess Jesus Christ to be the Author and Finisher of their faith, who do not also confess, in one sense or other, that He is the Founder and Head of a society destined to embrace all His followers, and fitted to be of permanent continuance. Men may differ widely as to their notions of the kind of community which Christ has actually established; but few, if any, will be found to deny that Christianity was designed to be something more than the religion of individuals, bound together by no tie, and gathered

into no outward society. In its primary and most important aspect, indeed, the revelation of God contained in the Bible is a revelation to me individually. Its discoveries of sin and announcements of judgment, its intimations of grace and its proclamations of a Saviour, its offers of an atoning blood to expiate, and a regenerating Spirit to purge, transgression,—these are addressed to me individually; and if I deal with them at all, I must deal with them as if there were no other in the world except myself and God. Alone with God, I must realize the Bible as if it were a message from Him to my solitary self, singled out and separated from other men, and feeling my own individual responsibility in receiving or rejecting it. But the Bible does not stop here: it deals with man, not only as a solitary unit in his relation to God, but also as a member of a spiritual society, gathered together in the name of Jesus. It is not a mere system of doctrines to be believed and precepts to be observed by each individual Christian independently of others, and apart from others: it is a system of doctrines and precepts, designed and adapted for a society of Christians. This agreement and co-operation of men holding the same faith and the same Saviour is not an accidental or voluntary union which has grown up of itself: it is a union designed beforehand, appointed from the beginning by God, and plainly contemplated and required in every page of the New Testament Scriptures. There are precepts in the Bible addressed, not to believers separately, but to believers associated together into a corporate society; there are duties that are enjoined upon the body, and not upon the members of which it is composed; there are powers assigned to the community, to which the individuals of the community are strangers; there is a government, an order, a code of laws, a system of ordinances and officers described in Scripture, which can apply to none other than a collective association of Christians. Without the existence of a Church, or of a body of believers, as contradistinguished from believers individually, very much of what is contained in the Bible would be unintelligible, and without practical application.

There are two aspects in which the Church, as a *society* of believers, in contradistinction from *individual* believers, is represented in Scripture, that serve to place it in an important and solemn point of view.

I. In the first place, the Church is spoken of as ‘the body of Christ,’ in a sense in which the words cannot be applied to the individual believer.¹ It cannot be said of any individual Christian, however richly endowed with spiritual gifts from the Saviour, that he is ‘the body of Christ.’ But in some sense, not the same with but similar to that in which the human nature of Christ was His body during His life on earth, can the Church, and not individuals, be said to be His body now. And just as the indwelling of the Son of God in the human nature of Christ richly endowed and gloriously exalted that nature with all spiritual graces and gifts and powers unknown to any other person, so the indwelling of Christ in His Church, in a way and manner unknown to individual believers, exalts and endows the Church with gifts and graces and powers which no Christian individually possesses. The Church is ‘the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.’²

II. In the second place, the Church is spoken of in Scripture as the residence or earthly dwelling-place of the Spirit, the Third Person of the glorious Godhead.³ It is no doubt true that the Spirit of God dwells in each individual believer, making his soul and body His temple, and glorifying the place of His presence with all heavenly and sanctified graces. But, over and above this, and in a higher sense than can apply to any individual Christian, the Spirit of God makes His dwelling in the Church, enriching that Church with all the fulness of life and power and privilege, which no single believer could receive or contain. As the body of the Son of God, as the earthly dwelling-place of the Spirit of God, the Church more than the Christian—the society more than the individual—is set forth to us as the highest and most glorious embodiment and manifestation of Divine power and grace upon the earth. And it is in reference to the society, and not to the individuals of which it is composed—to the Church and not to its single members—that very much of the language of the Bible refers.

¹ Eph. 1:23; 4:12; 5:23-32; Col. 1:18, 24; 3:15; 1 Cor. 12:12ff. 27.

² τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν πληρουμένου, Eph. 1:23. Comp. ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα κατοικῆσαι, Col. 1:19; ἐν αὐτῷ κατοικεῖ πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς θεότητος σωματικῶς, Col. 2:9

³ Rom. 8:9, 11, 16; 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 6:11, 15-17; Eph. 2:18, 22; 4:4. See the Greek in all these passages.

The field of discussion opened up by a consideration of the Bible, as a revelation of truths bearing on believers not individually, but as formed into a collective body and constituting the Church of Christ, is a very wide and important one. It embraces a vast variety of topics, many of them involving discussions the most delicate and difficult within the whole range of theology. It is a field which, in so far as regards a comprehensive and separate survey of it, is comparatively new and untrodden. It is indeed briefly adverted to in most of the ordinary systems of theology, and particular departments of it have been traversed, to a greater or less extent, on particular occasions of controversy; yet, as a whole, it has seldom been opened up at length, and systematically.

It was with no ordinary feelings of doubt and distrust in my own powers, that I first set myself to cope with this high argument. With that measure of ability which God has given me, and which the Church has called upon me to exercise in the Chair in this College to which the Doctrine of the Church belongs, I have endeavoured to open up the general principles, of a subject, almost entirely new in academic prelections, and especially arduous.

I have found the task to be one beset with difficulties neither few nor small. Not the least of these has been the entire absence of any adequate guide—or often of any guide at all—to aid me in shaping my course and forming my opinions with respect to many of the most difficult and delicate questions connected with my subject. I have been compelled to take up these opinions very much at my own hand, and to become myself a learner before I could attempt to teach; and upon such points as these it would be the very reverse of wisdom to dogmatize.

I shall be more than rewarded for the time and labour spent upon this great and arduous subject, if I have been enabled, in however small a measure, to impart some knowledge of the truths, or to suggest some of the grand principles, or even to awaken some interest in the argument of a department in theology, a thorough acquaintance with which is so essential for those who hope to occupy, or who already fill, that honourable yet responsible place, held by those who are put in trust with the work of the ministry in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

PART I
THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

CHAPTER I

The Church as Defined in Scripture

MANY, perhaps indeed most, of the controversies which have arisen in connection with ecclesiastical theology, are to be traced back to fundamental differences of opinion regarding the essential nature and character of that society which Christ has instituted. The different or opposite notions which men have professed to gather from Scripture, in regard to the origin and essential principles of the Christian Church, have necessarily led to conclusions widely different in regard to its functions, its authority, its ordinances, and its government. It is highly important, therefore, to lay down at the outset those scriptural principles as to the nature and character of the Church of Christ, which may prove to us guiding principles in our subsequent investigations into its powers, and the offices it is appointed to discharge. And the first question which naturally arises is regarding the meaning which ought to be attached to the word 'Church.' Different societies or associations of Christians are found claiming to themselves, and denying to others, the character and privileges of a Church of Christ; and opinions widely differing from each other are held as to the meaning of the designation. In such circumstances we must have recourse to the Word of God, in order that, by an examination of its statements, we may ascertain in what sense, or in what senses, the term Church is to be understood by us.

The word, ἐκκλησια, which is translated Church in our version of the New Testament, in its primary meaning denotes any assembly gathered together from a promiscuous multitude, whether it be or be not regularly organized, and whether it be for civil or ecclesiastical purposes. Examples both in classical and inspired writers are at hand to prove the extensive meaning of the term;¹ and the same wide signification belongs to the corresponding word in the Hebrew of the Old Testament.² In the application of the term to secular assemblies, we find it used to signify the city council, convened in an orderly manner by the magistrate for the determination of civil matters; as in Acts 19, where the town-clerk of Ephesus is represented as addressing the citizens: 'If Demetrius, and the craftsmen who are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye inquire anything concerning other matters, it shall be determined (ἐν τῇ ἐννόμῳ ἐκκλησίᾳ) in a lawful convention.' In a similar application of the term to secular assemblies, we find it employed to denote a riotous assemblage of people, gathered together in a disorderly crowd, for purposes of tumult; as in the same chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, when it is said, in regard to the mob who assaulted Paul and his companions: 'Some therefore cried one thing, and some another, for (ἡ ἐκκλησια) the assembly or crowd was confused.' With this wide use of the term, as applied to secular assemblies, it is plain that the precise signification of the word, in any given instance, is to be gathered from the manner in which it is employed, and from the context. The same is true in regard to the use of the term ἐκκλησια, when applied to sacred or ecclesiastical assemblies of people. Here, too, the range of its application is a wide one; and the precise meaning of the word, in any particular case, must be ascertained from the general sense of the passage and from the context. There are five different but closely

¹ See Schleusner, *Lexicon Nov. Test. in voc. ἐκκλησια*.

² כְּתִיבָה (from כָּתַב = in *Hiph.* to call together), 'congregation,' 'assembly,' LXX. ἐκκλησια, and συναγωγή, twice το πληθος, and once συνεδριον and πῦρ (from ἔστη = to appoint, and in *Niph.* to come together), 'congregation,' 'assembly,' LXX. συναγωγή, once παρεμβολη, and once ἐπισυστασις; כְּתִיבָה, again (from כָּתַב = καλεω), 'convocation,' 'assembly,' LXX. κλητος, ἐπικλητος, is always restricted, in the Old Testament, to an assembly for religious purposes.

allied meanings of the term 'Church' to be gathered from Scripture.

I. The word Church signifies the whole body of the faithful, whether in heaven or on earth, who have been or shall be spiritually united to Christ as their Saviour.

There are many examples in Scripture of the use of the term in this wide sense. The first occasion on which the word occurs in the New Testament is one of these, when our Lord declares that 'the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church,'¹—language which plainly refers to the society or association of all those who had believed or should believe in Him. All history proves that particular and local Churches may fall away from the faith into complete and final apostasy. The promise of our Lord can apply to no special community except the universal Church of Christ, invisible to human eye, and known only to His, consisting of all true believers, and of none else. Again, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, we are told that Christ 'loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.'² That society of men for whom Christ died, and who shall, each one of them, be presented at last holy and without spot before God, is plainly a society the members of which no man can number or declare by any external mark; which can be restricted to no geographical locality, and can be recognised by no features visible to the outward eye. It is the society of the elect, and not identical with any outward Church or Churches of whatsoever name. It is the spiritual and invisible Church of the Redeemer, known only to Himself, of which Scripture thus speaks; and in entire accordance with this use of the term Church in Scripture to denote a society comprehending the whole body of the elect, and none else, are other names or titles given to it in the New Testament. The Church is at one time spoken of under the mysterious name of the Bride or Spouse of Christ,³—an expression which can apply to no local or particular Church—to no society, indeed, at all, measured and recognised by the eye of man under any form, or under all forms,

¹ Matt. 16:18

² Eph. 5:25-27.

³ Song of Sol. 2:10ff.; 4:7, 9ff.; Eph. 5:32; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17.

of Christian profession,—but must be intended to mark out those, and those only, who have been espoused to Christ through the holy union of His Spirit with theirs. At another time it is spoken of as ‘the temple of the Holy Ghost,’ ‘a spiritual house,’ ‘an habitation of God through the Spirit,’¹—language plainly designed to mark out a society defined by no outward limits, but identical with the whole number of spiritual Christians of whatsoever society throughout the world, who have been quickened by the Spirit.

And, finally, the Church is described as ‘the body of Christ,’ all the members of which are united to Him as the Head of life and influence and grace to them,²—a description not applicable to any outward body of professing Christians made up of any or all communions, but only to be realized in that great multitude which no man has seen or numbered, who make up the invisible Church of the Redeemer, and whose names are written in heaven. In these passages, and in many others, we have a society defined and described, which embraces the whole number of Christ’s elect, and none but they,—a society not identical with any known on earth, and not to be recognised by any local names or notes or boundaries,—a society marked out from any other by the possession of certain high and mysterious privileges, and standing in a very close and peculiar relation to Christ, but unseen and unknown of man,—a society whose members are unreckoned and unobserved on earth, but all of whom are numbered and known in heaven. Such is the *invisible* Church of the Redeemer. ‘The catholic or universal Church,’ says the Confession of Faith, ‘which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been or shall be gathered into one under Christ, the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.’³

¹ Eph. 2:21, 22; 1 Cor. 3:16, 17; 2 Cor. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:5.

² 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 3:6; 4:12, 16; Col. 1:18; 2:19.

³ Conf. chap. xxv. 1. [‘We recognise the head in that man who was born of the Virgin Mary etc. This is the head of the Church. The body for this head is the Church, not the Church which is in this place but which is in this place and throughout the whole world; not the Church which exists at this time, but the Church from Abel himself to those who are destined to be born right up to the end and to believe in Christ, the whole population of saints belonging to the one city—the city which is the body of Christ, whose head is Christ.’ Aug. in Psalm 90:1. *Opera*, ed. Migne, tom. iv. Pars ii. p. 1159.]

II. The term Church is made use of in Scripture to denote the whole body throughout the world of those that outwardly profess the faith of Christ.

Over and above that unseen society, consisting of the whole number of the elect, who are spiritually united to Christ, there is set forth to us in Scripture another society, externally connected with Christ, and standing out visibly before the eyes of the world. This is the visible Church of Christ, known to men by the outward profession of faith in Him, and by the practice of those Church ordinances and observances which He has appointed for His worshippers. It is not to be identified with the invisible Church, for men may belong to the one society, who do not truly belong to the other; and the relation in which the one body stands to Christ is different from the relation occupied by the other. Neither are the two to be wholly placed in opposition to each other; for they form, not so much two separate Churches, as one Church under two distinct and different characters or aspects,—the invisible Church being spiritually united to Christ, the visible being externally united to Him for the sake of the other. This outward society of professing Christians is frequently spoken of and delineated in Scripture under the term Church. It is spoken of in the Acts of the Apostles, when it is said that ‘the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved.’¹ It is spoken of in the Epistle to the Corinthians, when mention is made by Paul of the outward provision which God has made for the order and government and edification of the Church: ‘And God has set some in the Church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healing, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.’² It is spoken of again, in reference to the same matter, in the Epistle to the Ephesians, when the same inspired writer says that Christ ‘gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.’³ In such passages, it is plain that a visible society of professing Christians is referred to, known and marked out among men by certain outward ordinances

¹ Acts 2:47.

² 1 Cor. 12:28.

³ Eph. 4:11, 12.

and observances peculiar to them, but not to be confounded with the invisible Church made up of the elect. Under the outward form of the visible Church, the invisible society of true believers may to a great extent lie concealed; but under that outward form there may be multitudes also, not truly members of the body of Christ, and only joined to Him by external profession and external ordinances.

That a Church visible and outward, known and recognised by the profession of the faith of Christ and the administration of Christ's ordinances, and yet not to be identified with the invisible society of true believers, is acknowledged and described in Scripture, may be distinctly ascertained, from a careful consideration of the various acceptations in which the word Church is made use of in the New Testament. But if additional evidence were desired on this point, it would be found in various parables of our Lord, in which He more especially describes the visible Church under the expressive title of 'the kingdom of heaven.' 'The kingdom of heaven,' said our Lord on one occasion, 'is like unto a net that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.'¹ This separation of the good from the evil in His kingdom or visible Church is to take place, as He expressly adds, 'at the end of the world,' when 'the angels shall sever the wicked from among the just,'—the visible Church in this world being made up, in the meantime, of a multitude of true and feigned believers under one common profession, and yet being recognised by Christ as His Church. 'The kingdom of heaven,' said our Lord in another parable, 'is like unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprang up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also.' And was this introduction of the tares into the visible Church inconsistent with its character as a Church, and immediately to be remedied by their removal? 'Nay,' continues the parable, 'lest, while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest.'² To exactly the same effect is that remarkable similitude, in which our Lord likens

¹ Matt. 13:47-49.

² Matt. 13:24-30, 36-43.

the relation between Himself and His Church to the union subsisting between the vine and the branches. 'I am the true vine,' said He, 'and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every branch that beareth fruit He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.' 'I am the vine, ye are the branches.' 'If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered.'¹ It is plain that in such language our Lord recognised a twofold union to Himself,—one, a living union, like that of the fruitful branch in the vine; the other, a dead or mere external union, such as the unfruitful branch in the vine, that was cast forth and withered; and such precisely is the twofold connection with Christ, exemplified in the case respectively of the invisible and the visible Church. Those who are united to the Saviour by a living union,—unseen indeed of men, but known to Him,—constitute that society of believers spoken of in Scripture as the spiritual or invisible Church of Christ. Those, on the other hand, who are united to the Saviour by an external union of outward profession and outward privileges, known and seen of men, numbering among them the true believers in Christ, but not exclusively made up of true believers, constitute the visible Church. 'The visible Church,' says the Confession of Faith, 'which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (not confined to one nation as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children, and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.'²

III. The term Church is frequently employed in Scripture to denote the body of believers in any particular place, associated together in the worship of God.

¹ John 15:1-8.

² Conf. chap. xxv. 2. [Comp. also the *Second Book of Discipline*, chap. i. 1. 'The Kirk of God is sumtymes largelie takin for all them that professe the Evangill of Jesus Christ, and so it is a Company and Fellowship not onely of the Godly, but also of Hypocrites professing always outwardly ane true Religion; uther Tymes it is takin for the Godlie and Elect onlie.'—Dunlop's *Collection of Confessions of Faith, Catechisms, Directories, Books of Discipline, etc. of Publick Authority in the Church of Scotland*, Edinr. 1722, vol. ii. p. 759. 'The church comprises those persons in whom there is true knowledge and confession of the faith and truth.'—Nicolas de Lyra (ob. 1340), quoted by Melanchthon in the *Apol. Conf Aug.* chap. 4.

This third meaning of the word lies on the very surface of Scripture, and requires almost no illustration. Even in the case of two or three professing Christians, met together for prayer and worship, whether publicly or in private houses, the term ἐκκλησία is applied to them in the New Testament; and that, too, before such a congregation might be organized, by having regular office-bearers and minister appointed over them. In the Acts of the Apostles we are told that Paul and Barnabas ‘ordained them elders in every Church’ as they journeyed through Lystra and Iconium and Antioch,¹—language which plainly recognises the congregation of professing believers as a Church, even previously to the ordination of office-bearers among them. The body of believers in any particular place associating together for worship, whether numerous or not, have the true character of a Church of Christ. Thus the Apostle Paul on some occasions recognises as a Church the meeting of believers in the private house of some one or other of his converts. ‘Greet,’ says he in the Epistle to the Romans, ‘Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus; likewise greet the Church that is in their house.’² In his Epistle to the Corinthians the same apostle sends to his converts, first, the salutation of the Churches of Asia, and second, the salutation of the congregation or Church assembling in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. ‘The Churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the Church that is in their house.’³ In like manner, in the Epistle to the Colossians, we hear, ‘Salute Nymphas, and the Church which is in his house;’ and in the Epistle to Philemon, ‘To the Church in thy house: grace and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ;’⁴—so numerous and distinct are the testimonies to this third meaning of the term Church, as a company of professing Christians, however small, associated together in any one place for the worship and service of God.

IV. The word Church is applied in the New Testament to a number of congregations associated together under a common government.

¹ Acts 14:23.

² Rom. 16:3-5.

³ 1 Cor. 16:19.

⁴ Col. 4:15; Philem. 23

It is not necessary to suppose that the term 'Church,' when used in reference to the society of professing Christians belonging to one locality, was limited to a single congregation meeting in one building. On the contrary, there seems to be the strongest evidence for assuming that a plurality of congregations, meeting for worship in separate houses, but connected together under one ecclesiastical order, was designated by the general term of *a* Church. It is not necessary at this stage to enter at length into the discussion of a point, which will more naturally fall to be argued when we come to speak of the government of the Church. It may be enough at present simply to indicate the kind of argument by which it can be shown that the word Church is not restricted in its application to a single congregation, but is used in reference to more than one connected together under one common ecclesiastical arrangement. This will sufficiently appear if we take the case of the converts at Jerusalem, who are spoken of under the general name of 'the Church at Jerusalem,' but who, nevertheless, must have constituted more than one congregation in that city. There is enough recorded in the Acts of the Apostles regarding the vast number of Christians at Jerusalem, to forbid the supposition that they could have met all together in one congregation, or under one roof, for their ordinary religious services. On one occasion—that of the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost—we are expressly told that 'there were added' to the number of believers previously at Jerusalem 'about three thousand souls.' After this it is declared that '*daily* the Lord added to the Church such as should be saved.'¹ At a later period still, when Peter had preached after healing the lame man at the gate of the temple, we are told that 'many of them that heard the word believed; and the number of the men (*ἀνδρῶν*) was about five thousand,'²—a number evidently exclusive of women. Even this vast number of converts was still further augmented; for in the next chapter we are told that 'believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.'³ And at a subsequent date we have the testimony of James, speaking to Paul respecting the converts at Jerusalem: 'Thou seest, brother, how many thousands (literally,

¹ Acts 2:41, 47.

² Acts 4:4.

³ Acts 5:14.

myriads, ποσὰι μυριαδῶν) of Jews there are which believe.¹ With such facts as these before us regarding the multitudes of converts at Jerusalem, it seems impossible to maintain that the Church there consisted of no more than one solitary congregation, worshipping together under a single roof. No one building could have contained the many thousands of believers that crowded Jerusalem at that time in the fulness of a Pentecostal harvest; nor is it possible, except under the influence of some misleading theory, to believe that they formed no more than one congregation. The conclusion, then, seems to be inevitable, that when we read of *the* Church at Jerusalem, we find the term applied, not to a single congregation of believers, but to a plurality of congregations, connected together as one body or Church by means of a common government. An examination of the cases of the Church at Corinth and the Church of Ephesus would lead to a similar conclusion, and would justify us in affirming that the word Church in these instances also denotes, not a single congregation of worshippers, but several congregations associated together by vicinity of place, but still more by a common ecclesiastical rule and order. I do not stop at present to inquire under what form of government separate congregations were thus connected together. The fact that they were so is all that is necessary for us to know in assigning to the term Church this fourth signification.

V. The word Church is applied, in the New Testament, to the body of professing believers in any place, as represented by their rulers and office-bearers.

The principle of representation is fully and frequently recognised in Scripture as having a place in the dispensations of God, as well as in the ordinary transactions of life; nor can it seem anything new to find the body of believers in any given place represented by their office-bearers, and the term primarily descriptive of the one applied to the other. An example of this application of the term Church is to be found in Matthew 18, when our Lord is laying down the principles on which a Christian ought to proceed in the case of a brother who has trespassed against him. If, after dealing with the offender as to his fault, first in private with himself alone, and then in the presence of

¹ Acts 21:20.

two or three witnesses, he shall still neglect to hear and acknowledge his offence, the command of our Lord is to 'tell it to the Church.' In such an injunction our Lord referred to the synagogue Court known and established among the Jews, which had its elders and officers for the decision of such matters of discipline; and in the expression 'the Church,' which He made use of, the Jews who heard Him *must* have understood the authorized rulers, as distinct from the ruled, to be the parties who were to determine in such controversies. An impartial consideration of this text in its connection seems to justify the assertion that the word Church is in Scripture, among its other meanings, employed to denote the rulers or office-bearers of the Christian society.

Such are the five different senses in which the word Church is used in the New Testament Scriptures; and it is not unimportant to remark the connection between them, and the order in which they stand related to each other. The primary and normal idea of the Church, as set forth in Scripture, is unquestionably that of a body of men spiritually united to Christ, and, in consequence of that union, one with each other, as they are one with Him. From this fundamental idea of the universal invisible Church of Christ, all the others are derived. Add to this *first* idea of a Church, as indicated in Scripture, an outward provision of government, ordinances, and office-bearers, appointed for the purpose of ministering to the edification of its members, and you have the visible Church, as laid down in the New Testament,—an outward society formed upon the inward and spiritual one, and established and maintained in the world for its benefit. Add to this *second* scriptural idea of a Church the further notion of locality, so that instead of being viewed in its universal character as extending over all the world, it is viewed in its local character as existing in certain places, and limited to them,—and you learn the *third* meaning of the term as found in the New Testament, namely, a body of professing Christians assembling together in one place for the worship and service of God. Further still, annex to this third notion of the Church, as existing in particular localities and congregations, the additional idea of co-operation and union under some one form of ecclesiastical government, and you arrive at the *fourth* meaning of the word Church in Scripture,—a number of

particular congregations associated together under one Church order and authority. And lastly, to this fourth idea of a Church conjoin the principle of representation, so largely developed both in the dispensations of God and in the arrangements of civil society, and you reach the *fifth* and final use of the term as found in the Bible, namely, to denote a society or societies of professing Christians, as represented by their office-bearers and rulers. From the single germ of one believer or of several believers, vitally united to a Saviour, and in the enjoyment of the privileges belonging to that union, it is not difficult to trace the Church of Christ under all the different yet closely allied characters in which it is defined and delineated in Scripture.¹

It is of great importance, at the outset, to fix with some measure of precision the different significations in which the word Church is used in Scripture, because of the opposite opinions entertained by different parties as to this matter,—opinions which cannot fail to bear directly or indirectly upon every step in our subsequent discussions. For example, the Romanist sets himself in opposition to the first of those meanings which we have found to be attached in Scripture to the term Church. He is prepared to deny altogether, or, if not to deny abstractly, yet practically to set aside, the idea of an invisible Church as the primary and fundamental one, and to substitute that of a visible Church in its stead. Bossuet, in his *Variations of the Protestant Churches*, goes so far as to charge upon the Reformers the invention of the idea of a Church invisible, with a view to meet the alleged difficulty, so often urged by Romanists, of the visible existence of no Church, identical in principles and character with the Reformed before the Reformation.² And more

¹ Compare with these five meanings of the term Church those given by Mr. Palmer, who may be taken as a representative of the English High Church party: *Treatise on the Church of Christ*, Lond. 1838, vol. i. pp. 4, 5. [Also Wordsworth's *Theoph. Angl.*, Lond. 1863, Part i. chaps. i. ii. iii. Nitzsch, *System der christl. Lehre*, 6te Ausg. § 187: 'The church is first, and before it is anything else, the congregation of saints and even to that extent an object of faith ...' Comp. Melancthon in *Apol. Conf. Aug.* art. iv.: 'The church is principally a bond of faith and the Holy Spirit in people's hearts.']

² Bossuet, *Variations of the Protestant Churches*, Dublin 1836, vol. ii. pp. 281, 290, 2d ed.

recent Romanist controversialists, if they do not in so many terms deny the existence of a Church invisible, endeavour to substitute in its stead that of a visible body as the leading and normal idea of the Christian society. Now, concede to Romanists the position they are so anxious to assume, and deny that there is an invisible and spiritual Church at all, or at least that this is the primary and leading idea of the Christian society; grant that the outward and visible Church is the source from which the inward and invisible is derived,—and you open up the way for some of the worst and most characteristic errors of Popery. That single admission with respect to the fundamental idea of the Christian society, prepares the way for making communion with an outward Church take the place of a spiritual reality, and substituting the external charm of priestly arts and sacramental grace for the living union of the soul to the Saviour.¹

Or, take another example from the case of the Independents. Independents deny the second of the five meanings which we have found ascribed to the word Church in Scripture. They repudiate altogether the idea of a visible Church, sustaining a real, although external, relation to Christ, and composed of His professing people. Now, concede to the Independents this position, and set aside the idea of a visible Church with its outward order and privileges, and you concede to them at the same time all that is necessary to determine in their favour the question regarding the character and qualifications of Church members, and to establish their principles on the subject of 'pure communion.' In like manner the Independents reject the fourth and fifth meanings of the word Church. They deny that it is ever

¹ 'It is our view,' says Bellarmine, after reviewing the opinions of the Reformers regarding the Church visible and invisible, 'that the Church is only one, not two, and that one and true Church is a congregation of men gathered together through the profession of the same Christian faith and fellowship in the same Sacraments, under the direction of legitimate pastors, and especially of the Roman Pontiff, the one vicar of Christ on earth. From this definition', he most justly adds, 'it can easily be inferred what men belong to the Church and what do not.' Bell. *Opera*, tom. ii. lib. iii. chaps. ii. xi. xii., where he distinctly denies the existence of an invisible church, and argues against it at length. See also Möhler, *Symbolism*, Robertson's Transl., vol. ii. pp. 5 f. 108; 2d ed. [Comp. also Nitzsch's *protestantische Beantwortung der Symbolik Möhler's*, pp. 232, 233; Schleiermacher's *christliche Glaube*, Berlin 1830, Band i. p. 145, 2te Ausg.]

found in Scripture to signify either a plurality of congregations under one government, or simply the representatives or office-bearers of the congregation as contradistinguished from the congregation itself. Here, too, the difference of opinion in regard to the use and meaning of the term in Scripture is a fundamental one, giving rise to other and no less fundamental differences at future stages of the discussion. Admit the narrow position taken up by the Independents in regard to the true meaning and nature of a Church as defined in Scripture, restrict the term to one or other of the two significations of either the invisible Church at large, or a single congregation of believers in a particular locality, and you, in fact, concede every principle that is necessary for them to establish their views as to the form of the Church, and the nature of its government. There cannot be, in fact, a more important question, or one in the determination of which more fundamental principles are involved, than that in regard to the real nature of the Christian Church, as delineated in Scripture; and if we have succeeded in discovering the meaning of the term according to New Testament usage, we shall have done much to prepare the way for our future discussions.¹

¹ Principal Cunningham's *Works*, Edin. 1863, vol. ii. pp. 9-20. Apollonius, *Consideratio Quarund. Controv.* etc., Lond. 1644, cap. iii. pp. 27-51; Engl. Transl., Lond. 1645, *A Consideration*, etc., chap. iii. pp. 24-43. Mastricht, *Theologia Theoretico-Practica*, lib. vii. cap. i.