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BAYLOR UNIVERSITY

A CRITIQUE

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**This thesis is
dedicated in memory of my father,
Robert M. Maslin, now gloriously
promoted to the heavenly realms,
"absent from the body, but present
with the Lord."**

PREFACE

The following pages embody the research, observations and reflections of the author on the difficult problems of ascertaining the nature of the church.

It will be obvious to the reader that the author is a Baptist and writes mainly from his own point of view, and that of many Baptists, in the past and in the present. In treating a problem so complex and which requires a re-thinking of many relevant doctrines, the writer is conscious that This work is not without imperfections.

The writing of this work has proven to be a difficult and delicate task — so I dare not hope that it is without error. I have done my best, however, to make this a factual and objective study while still seeking to offer a positive solution to the problem.

To Dr. Jesse B. Thomas whose strong intellect and resistless logic exhibited in his book, *The Church and the Kingdom*; to Dr. F. J. A. Hort, the great Anglican theologian and his classical work, *The Christian Ecclesia*; to Dr. E. J. Fish and his excellent volume, *Ecclesiology*, together with the many other theologians and historians who have furnished a deeper insight into the nature of the church, the author is extremely grateful.

To Dr. George Humphrey and Dr. John Newport, professors of Bible of Baylor University, who have guided me in the preparation of this theses, I express sincere gratitude. To Mrs. Lois Douglas of the Baylor English Department, whose gracious assistance was given in preparation of the format, I am indeed thankful.

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INTRODUCTION

Importance of the study. The conception and adoption of the universal church theory has been called "The parent heresy in ecclesiology."¹ This contemporary reaction against such a concept, together with the diverse views pro and con make a fresh inquiry into the nature of the church of paramount importance.

Futhermore, the various church ideas that are seeking supremacy make this study a very pertinent one. These concepts are many, but this study is concerned only with the two which stand out above all the rest - the local and the universal.

A flippanant attitude toward the problem is not justifiable. It behooves the student of the Scriptures to make an honest and careful distinction and to assert the supremacy of the New Testament idea.

¹ R. K. Maiden, "Universal Church Heresy," *Re-thinking Baptist Doctrines*. Ed, by Victor I. Masters (Louisville: The Western Recorder Publishers, 1937), p. 160.

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The Universal Church Theory, — The universal Church theory in its commonly accepted form teaches that the universal invisible church is the true church as contra distinguished from the local church. This church was "born" at Pentecost, is composed of all believers and is entered upon conversion through a mystical baptism by the Holy Spirit. It is identified with the "mystical body of Christ," which is or will become the "Bride of Christ."

It can not be asserted that all who hold to this theory will agree with all of the above features of the theory, but this gives a telescopic view of the theory that has universally permeated and dominated ecclesiological teaching in current Christian literature. With few exceptions, the church concept of present-day literature is a one-sided emphasis upon the supposed existence of a universal invisible church.

When it is admitted that Christ founded a visible church on this earth, the church is either regarded as extinct or dying.¹

¹ "This assertion that the Visible Church, as instituted by Christ and his

apostles, has become extinct, needs no historic evidence to refute it. If it be true, God's plan is a failure!" *The Church: Its Polity and Fellowship* (Philadelphia: Bible and Publication Society.), p. 46.

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The subordinate particulars of the theory are many and varied. The church may be organized or diffused, actual or ideal, according to the individual writer's concept.

Definition of terms. — The concept of a universal church has been called, properly enough, a theory. The believed propositions set forth by these advocates are capable of being true or false. By marshalling the evidence an individual arrives at a relative or temporary judgment. There is always the possibility that evidence will be uncovered by which former convictions will be recognized as false. By the same process unbelief or rejection of certain beliefs leads to faith and acceptance. In many cases there is no need for uncovering of evidence but examination of available evidence. Indeed, in the author's estimation the evidence does not support a universal invisible theory of the church but rather opposes it.

This examination of the universal church theory must be differentiated from the Roman Catholic idea of

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an external reality. The problem under consideration is the question of the existence of a universal church in the sense of an invisible universality. This is distinguished from the Romanist view in that it is a counter-invention by Protestants. It must be considered as essentially a Protestant view and not necessarily Baptist. It is true that many outstanding Baptist theologians have endorsed this concept of the church - but not rightly so.

It is easy to understand why many Baptist theologians have gone on record in favor of this view. Baptist are characteristically tolerant, being champions of religious liberty. And this tolerance has made them inclusive in their theology and in many cases in practical co-operation. On the other hand, there are those who "seek to be spiritual rather than sentimental in their inclusiveness."¹

The question of the nature of the church is essentially a Baptist controversy. For the Roman

¹ W. R. White, *Baptist Distinctives* (Nashville: The Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1946), p. 58.

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Catholic it is absolutely and finally settled that the true Church is the "Holy Roman Catholic (Universal) Church." "Theocratic exigencies created by persistence in the traditional practices,"¹ makes it imperative that the protestant or non-Baptist groups retain the Reformation emphasis of a universal, invisible church. However, for the Baptist no such theory is necessary. In fact, when retained, there is a decided conflict between the greater, universal church and the lesser "insignificant" local church. Where the universal idea has been rejected the local idea has been given its rightful significance.

Method of Approach. — It is the author's purpose to adequately examine the universal church theory, its origin, its correlated ideas, and its implications and to present a consistent solution to the problem.

In order to fully understand the problem, this critical examination will be necessary. The representative opposing viewpoints will also be made the object of a thorough and critical study. Then, an inductive

¹ Jesse B. Thomas, *The Church and the Kingdom* (Louisville: Baptist Book Concern, 1914), p. 167.

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investigation of the doctrine of the church will at least show the excesses of the universal ideas and give accumulative proof for the persistent local idea.

This study is an inquiry into the essential nature of the church, and is primarily concerned with answering the question - "What is the church?" The following pages comprise a critical examination of the predominant theories and ideas held by evangelical Christianity that seek to answer this question.

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PART I

THE PROBLEM OF THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

CHAPTER I

REPRESENTATIVE UNIVERSAL CHURCH VIEWPOINTS

Dr. Scofield presents the case for a universal church in its generally accepted form together with its unfledged brood of correlated ideas. In a footnote on Hebrews 12:23 he outlined his view:

Church, (true), Summary: The true church, composed of the whole number of regenerated persons from Pentecost to the first resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:52), united together and to Christ by the baptism with the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:12, 13), is the body of Christ of which he is the head (Ephesians 1:22, 23). As such, it is a holy temple for the habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:21, 22); is 'one flesh' with Christ (Ephesians 5:30, 31); and espoused to Him as a chaste virgin to one husband (2 Corinthians 11:2-4).¹

Along this same line, with the idea of the "True Church," Dr. W. W. Everts says, "Christ's *ekklesia*, or church, embraces all the redeemed variously described as the mystic body, bride, family, temple, or kingdom of Christ."²

¹ C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917, p. 1304.

² W. W. Everts, *Baptist Layman's Book* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1887), p. 41.

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Dr. Henry G. Weston, who holds some of the same ideas as those of Dr. Scofield, defines *ekklesia* in one sense as "the whole body of believers in Christ, from the day of Pentecost to the end of the dispensation."¹

Dr. A. H. Strong, great Baptist theologian says:

The Church of Christ, in its largest signification, is the whole company of regenerated persons in all times and ages, in heaven and on earth. . . . In this sense, the church is identical with the spiritual kingdom of God; both signify that redeemed humanity in which God in Christ exercises actual spiritual dominion (John 3:3, 5)²

He distinguishes the invisible, universal church from the local or individual church; the latter constitutes a voluntary association of regenerate persons. This local church is a temporal form of the universal, "in which the idea of the church as a whole is concretely exhibited."³

Dr. Strong rejects any idea of an imperial or provincial connotation of the word ekklesia, and he

¹ E. H. Johnson, *An Outline of Systematic Theology* and Henry G. Strong, *Of Ecclesiology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1895), p. 319.

² Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1899), p. 494. Proof texts for above statement: Matthew 16:18, Ephesians 1:22, 23; 3:10, 5:24, 25; Colossians 1:18, Hebrews 12:23.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

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does this by designating a generic or collective use of the word "to denote simply the body of independent local churches existing in a given region or at a given epoch." A recognition of this principle, if extended further, explodes not only the imperial and provincial theories but the universal, invisible theory as well.

Dr. F. J. A. Hort, great Anglican theologian, holds somewhat to the invisible, universal church theory, but admits that it is without historical foundation.

He despairs of finding any such concept in any of the Biblical records with the exception of Ephesians and Colossians. The concept of the "one universal Ecclesia absolutely" is confined to these twin epistles according to Dr. Hort. He says:

"Here, at last, for the first time in the Acts and Epistles, we have 'the Ecclesia' spoken of in the sense of the one universal Ecclesia, and it comes more from the theological than from the historical side. . . .

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 496.

² F. J. A. Hort, *The Christian Ecclesia* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1900), p. 148.

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Dr. Hort has great difficulty in establishing the conventional Protestant conception of a universal church that is invisible. Most of his testimony rather affirms the persistent local idea. To establish Dr. Hort's theory involves the

further difficulty of the Apostle's wavering back and forth from universal to a local significance of ecclesia.¹

George Dana Boardman, in a discussion of "Ecclesia" gives its secular usages and defines, by way of illustration, its meaning as an assembly. He finds these different meanings to the word:

There is, first, . . . a particular company of Christians banded together in a definite place . . . there is, secondly, the entire aggregate of professing Christians² And there is, lastly, the spiritual company or ideal corporation of all Christians — including the saints in heaven and the saints on earth and the saints to come. . . .³

All of these meanings are supposed to define ecclesia!

Then Dr. Boardman declares venerably:

¹ Ibid. p. 161.

² George Dana Boardman, *The Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), p. 162. Proof texts for the second concept: Galatians 1:13, I Timothy 3:16.

³ Ibid. p. 162. Proof texts for the third concept: Matthew 16:18, Hebrews 12:23.

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Thus this word 'ekklesia', translated 'church', is a noble instance of verbal transfiguration, showing how our King does indeed make all things new, infusing into the originally secular idea of a lawful assembly of Greek citizens the new idea and exalted idea of a universal and celestial society, even Christ's own body, the fulness of him who fills all in all.¹

At best these statements constitute only a theological conclusion and cannot be substantiated by modern scholarship. However, it is safe to say that Christianity gave a new and Christian significance to *ekklesia*, but not one contrary to its recognized meaning.

Dr. A. Dakin, President of Bristol Baptist College in England identifies the Church of God with the family of God.

In the absolute sense it means the whole family of God as this is at the moment, and will be at the end. It includes all who have been, or are being, or will be redeemed in Christ. It thus embraces present fact and future reality, linking the present aeon with the age that is to come. Part of this Church of God is actually in time at any given

moment, part of it is in eternity, and part is not yet born.²

¹ Ibid.

² A. Dakin, *The Baptist View of the Church & Ministry* (London: The Baptist Union Publication Department, 1945), p. 7.

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Besides the local, visible meaning that *ekklesia* conveys, Dr. Harvey, with sufficient looseness, defines another connotation of the word:

It denotes the entire body of the elect in heaven and on earth - all who are embraced in the covenant of grace and who shall be gathered into the everlasting kingdom of Christ. Here the word is used figuratively, the name of a part designating the whole; and all redeemed souls are conceived as forming one grand assembly.¹

It can readily be seen that there is no agreement among the advocates of this universal, invisible church theory in many of its particulars. There is absolutely no uniformity on the choice of proof texts to uphold the theory. The advocates of the theory can approach agreement only on those texts confined to Ephesians and Colossians. Even then not all of the supporters want to confine all of the instances that refer to the church to either the universal or to the local idea.

The men who have been mentioned are by no means the only ones who have set forth this theory but they are representative. Some less scholarly individuals

¹ H. Harvey, *The Church: its Polity and Ordinances* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1879), p. 27.

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set forth this view practically to the exclusion of the local church.

These representative viewpoints show clearly the confusion in the ranks of the advocates of this theory. The theological interpretations of these men differ all the way from identifying the church with the family of God, and/or the kingdom of God, to establishing it as something distinct from and transcendent of either.

The selection of these particular quotations from the above men and their writings is made only to show their diverse ideas, and the problems involved in adopting the universal, invisible church concepts.

No doubt there are other theologians who have presented the theory as clearly and are just as persistent in adhering to it. However, these quotations

portray the predominant strain of thought concerning the nature of the church and related doctrines.

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CHAPTER II

REPRESENTATIVE OPPOSING VIEWS

Conversely, the opposition to the universal church theory can by no means be considered harmonious. There is the same breadth of diversity in the opposing views as there is in the expression of the subject theory.

It would be impossible to present all of the different shades of the opposing viewpoints but three rather definite viewpoints are presented in opposition to the commonly accepted universal church theory.

The Ideal Concept. - Dr. H. E. Dana, formerly of Central Baptist Seminary, sets out an ideal concept of the church as representing spiritual Israel.¹ His ideal concept is somewhat anti-universal in that he maintains that it does not embrace "all churches in some objective form of organization."² He does not hold to the orthodox

¹ Cf. H. E. Dana, *A Manual of Ecclesiology* (Kansas City: Central Seminary Press, 1944), p. 56.

² Ibid. p. 56, 57.

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protestant conception of a functioning universal, invisible church. This view is more or less a figurative conception, which cannot be made the basis for theory of church polity.¹

Dr. Conner, late professor of Systematic Theology in the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, agrees to a large extent with this church concept. He feels that the word church, "seems to be used in the sense of a body of Christians assembling at a particular place. . . and in the sense of an ideal assembly composed of all Christians on earth at any particular time. . . ."²

Even though he shares this concept, Dr. Conner does not conceal from himself the difficulties that attend the effort to fix upon the invisible idea. He readily admits that "the term invisible. . . is not a happy one".³

There are two outstanding points of difference between the ideal concept and the commonly accepted

¹ Cf. Ibid., P. 56, 57.

² Walter T. Conner, *The Gospel of Redemption* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1946), p. 270.

³ Ibid.

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universal church theory.

The universal church theory advocates usually teach that the local church is merely a manifestation of the invisible, but Dr. Dana maintains that:

This spiritual conception of the *ekklesia* has no concrete expression in the form of objective existence, for the local *ekklesia* is a thing of different nature and function.¹

A further departure from the universal church theory is Dr. Dana's sweeping rejection of Matthew 16:18, and all passages except those in Ephesians and Colossians as proof texts. The most important of these is Matthew 16:18, which he does not even use to prove his ideal concept. He defines the use of *ecclesia* here as "the local significance, used in a generic sense."²

Although these major differences exist between Dana's view of the church and the commonly accepted universal church theory, it will be observed that the similarity is equally as great. Both concepts of the church constitute the entire number of the redeemed

¹ Dana, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

² Ibid., p. 40.

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for some period of time.

Dr. E. J. Fish raises an objection that is mutually applicable to both of these views. He says:

For any one to assume that disciples out of the church as well as those in it are meant when the term church is used, is every whit as

illogical as to assume that children who do not attend school as well as those who do are covered by the term school.¹

There are four other serious objections to the concept of an ideal church constituting spiritual Israel:

1. Paul's identification of the *ekklesia* with spiritual Israel is never directly stated but is based upon an assumption that the *ekklesia* must be identified with this Pauline conception. But this is something wholly incongruous with Paul's conception of the church elsewhere; it rather fits the New Testament conception of the kingdom which is expressly spiritual and invisible.

2. Any idea that Paul had of the congregation of Israel as a great spiritual entity does not fit a spiritual or ideal concept of the church. *Ekklesia* was used only to describe Israel when they were assembled;

¹ E. J. Fish, *Ecclesiology* (New York: The Authors' Publishing Co., 1857), p. 97.

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to speak of them otherwise requires a designation such as family or kingdom.

3. Even if the ideal concept were true, the *ekklesia* would be only imaginative. Whether named the invisible church or the ideal church it would have no more reality than before it was named. "It would still be a mere creation of the brain."¹ Any such conception is alien to the writers of the Word. The entities of which these writers conceived such as the Kingdom and spiritual Israel though invisible in nature were not imaginative but declared to exist as reality. Because of the essential visible nature of the *ekklesia* it would be impossible to conceive of it as something imaginary.

4. Both of the letters which contain the proof texts for the ideal concept, though encyclical in nature, are "avowedly addressed to a constituency peculiarly strong in Gentile association."²

Ephesians explicitly proclaims the Gentile constituency that is the recipient of the letter - "ye

¹ A. C. Dayton, *Theodosia Ernest*, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society), p. 127.

² Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

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were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,"¹ "the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,"² "walk not as other Gentiles walk."³

The recipients of the Colossian letter were probably of Phrygian stock. It seems that all three of the churches which received the letter were characteristically Gentiles. Many of the churches mentioned in the New Testament have a strong Jewish element in them, but the churches which Paul is addressing here contained only a minority group of Hebrews.⁴

In these epistles both writer and reader are predominately Hellenes or Hellenized and so, "the presumption of conformity to popular Gentile conception naturally increases in force."⁵

Dr. Thomas sums up the whole problem and gives the most logical answer when he says:

¹ Ephesians 2:12.

² Ephesians 3:1.

³ Ephesians 4:17.

⁴ The three churches to which the letter was immediately destined were located at Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis in the valley of the Lycus.

⁵ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

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It could hardly be presumed that an intelligent writer, addressing a Greek constituency would inject into a familiar word a sense not only unfamiliar, but 'repugnant,' to his reader's methods of thought; expecting him to fish out intuitively the idea meant to be conveyed.¹

If the Apostle were identifying the *ekklesia* with spiritual Israel he would have clearly set it out so that his message would be understandable to all. As it stands, the obvious significance, as understood by the Gentile readers, is that now, as a result of Christ's work on the cross — abolishing the barriers between Jew and Gentile — they could now be members of the same assembly or body as were the Jews. Previously the Gentiles were looked upon as heathen, with no relation to the Jewish nation. There was no common ground on which to unite religiously. But now the Gentiles are fellowheirs of the promise and all can work together in the assembly for the promotion of the end of the Kingdom of God.

It must be recognized that Dr. Dana and other writers have made a valuable contribution in clarifying some of the particulars of the problem of the nature of the church. But, generally speaking, the ideal

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 280, 281.

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concept is an explanation that does not explain, a solution that does not solve the problem.

Glory Church View. — The second representative opposing view is set out by Dr. B. H. Carroll, patriarch of Southwestern Baptists. He accounts for the passages of broader significance as representing a glory church. He describes the ecclesia here as "*prospective*, not actual."

This same idea is described by other writers as the "Church Triumphant," "The Heavenly Church," and other futuristic connotations.

Dr. Carroll's interpretation is a possibility. That is, if his theological assumptions are true, his use of the word prospectively is consistent with its essential meaning, as well as is the generic use.

It may be then, that in their perfected state all believers shall be presented to Christ as an assembly without spot or blemish. This is future, and so to say that all believers in the aggregate constitute an *ekklesia* now is a perversion of the imagination.

Nevertheless, there are plausible objections to this theory. The two passages cited as proof-texts

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are not sufficient to establish a doctrine of the Glory Church. The majority of Christians expositors regard these passages as references to the Bride of Christ, but that is not expressly stated in either case.

The passage in Ephesians 5:25-27 can only be assumed to refer to the Bride of Christ - an assumption that is extremely questionable as Dr. Dana points out:

Nowhere in the passage does he call the church the bride of Christ, but says only that a husband should love his wife with the same intense love that Christ had for the Church.¹

The assumption that this passage refers to the Bride of Christ is arrived at by connecting it to the apocalyptic reference to the Bride in Revelation 21:9, 10.

Dr. Thomas opposes this method of interpretation. He says:

To interpret a practical letter to living men by the mystic symbolism of the Apocalypse is, at the best, a precarious kind of exegesis.²

To determine what the Bible actually teaches about the Bride is not a part of

this study. It is only necessary to point out that the figure does not

¹ Dana, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

² Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

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correspond to any idea of a universal, invisible church or a concept of the glory church.

Indeed, in Revelation "The bride" is not described as 'the church', but the 'holy city': a throne being in its midst; an idea wholly incongruous with all representations of the earthly *ecclesia*.¹

Without being able to completely dismiss the glory church concept, it can be admitted as a possibility. However, the objections against the viewpoint carry enough weight to set it aside as an insufficient and faulty explanation.

Persistent Local View. — Dr. Jessie B. Thomas, a thorough scholar, sets out the most consistent view of the nature of the church. He maintains that the Scriptures "steadily and consistently" set over against the kingdom, "the 'church' as a present, local, individual, visible organization, capable of indefinite multiplication." ²

He readily concedes the institutional or generic sense but rejects the idea of universality and invisibility, which are peculiar to the kingdom, as applying to the church.

¹ *Loc. cit.*, p. 284.

² Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 286.

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Dr. Fish, after a thorough examination of the Scripture passages containing *ekklesia* arrives at the same conclusion. He says:

Thus we have surveyed every use of the term in the New Testament and find not one having reference to our Lord's *ecclesia*, which does not fall under the local idea or one of its logical derivatives, which are simply the local idea in another form.¹

Dr. J. R. Graves, a prominent Tennessee Baptist of the latter part of the nineteenth century, rejects the idea of an invisible church. Concerning the ten instances in which *ecclesia* does not refer to a local organization, he says "it is used figuratively - by synecdoche - where a part is put for the whole, the singular for the plural, one for all."²

This idea is essentially the same as the generic concept but expressed in different terms.

Dr. Graves stoutly rejects the idea of even one passage affording "the shadow of a ground for the idea of an invisible church in heaven, any more than a huge universal, national or provincial church on earth."³

¹ Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

² J. R. Graves, *Old Landmarkism* (Texarkana: Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1928), p. 39.

³ *Ibid.*

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He further declares that "a multitude of passages preclude the idea."¹

The New Hampshire Confession of Faith, probably more widely adopted than any other by the Baptist churches of America, refers to only one kind of church, and there is no allusion to a universal church unless it be implied by the appellative "visible." It simply defines the church as a "congregation of baptized believers."

Other objections. — Without attempting to classify all of the church concepts attendant, it is profitable to point out several other objections to the universal church theory. These show how other Baptist leaders have recognized the error of the commonly accepted universal church theory. They should be viewed as representative of those who have stopped to examine the real nature of the church and have found insurmountable difficulties with the universal, invisible explanation of the nature of the church.

Dr. W. R. White, President of Baylor University, expresses his opposition to the actual, present existence of a universal, invisible church when he declares:

¹ *Ibid.*

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There is no actual, functioning universal church, whether invisible, or visible, in existence today. Nowhere is such an idea taught in the New Testament.¹

Dr. Thomas Armitage, the great Baptist historian, is among those who oppose the universal, invisible church idea. He says that "an invisible church is a purely indefinite and mythical idea."²

Dr. Armitage is probably more in harmony with the idea of a generic use of *ekklesia* than any of the other mentioned views as indicated by his statement:

When Jesus is called the Founder, the Head, the Redeemer of his 'Ecclesia', it is clearly meant, that what he is to one Christian congregation he is to all such congregations, the same severally and collectively.

Dr. Roy Mason recognized the heresy of this concept and writes in descriptive terms:

This theory, which plays exegetical tricks, employs specious arguments and minimized the importance of the true churches of Christ, is a theory that has been and is a curse to the cause of Christ. It is one of the most widespread and hurtful heresies of our day, and yet, strange to say, without foundation and contrary to common

¹ White, *op. cit.* p. 53.

² Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists* (New York: Bryan, Taylor and Co. 1887) P. 121.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

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sense once it is subject to close scrutiny.¹

No solution to this problem concerning the nature of the church will be without difficulties. All of the previously mentioned writers in this chapter have contributed rich insights into the problem, but of necessity one view is more consistent than the rest - the persistent local view which rests solidly upon both historical and theological foundations.

¹ Roy Mason, *The Church That Jesus Built*, Sixth Edition, pp. 35, 36.

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CHAPTER III

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH THEORY

The appellatives "universal," "invisible," "true," and other like terms are used so presumptuously by the advocates of this theory as to lead one to believe that they are actually contained in the Scriptures. However, a critical examination of the origin of these appellations reveals that they, as well as the universal church theory itself were post-apostolic in their formulation. Such phrases as the "universal church," "the rapture of the church" "mystical body of Christ," and others are commonly quoted as Scripture and the greater part of Christendom had not stopped to realize or discover that they are not part of God's special revelation.

Apostolic usage. - The evidence is against any idea of a pre-apostolic or apostolic concept of an ecclesia other than a visible assembly. Even when the

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word was used to designate ancient Israel it was used to characterize them only in an assembled capacity. It was never used to designate scattered or unassembled Israel.

Adolf Harnack,¹ the great German historian and theologian, testifies against the idea of a universal invisible church idea in apostolic Christianity. He says:

No one thought of the desperate idea of an invisible church; this notion would probably have brought about a lapse from pure Christianity far more rapidly than the idea of the Holy Catholic Church.²

The first two centuries are almost devoid of any heresy concerning the nature of the church. Evidently its inherent local nature was not questioned or disputed.

The works of the Fathers of the first two centuries that have come down to us contain no distinct treatise on the Church. The statements on the subject scattered through their writings, though by no means scanty, are for the most part of a purely

¹ Harnack is an acknowledged master among the historians of primitive Christianity and so his testimony in this connection carries great weight.

² Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*. Translated from the third German edition by Neil Buchanan (Williams & Norgate, 1896) II, p. 83.

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practical or even devotional character. Rarely do the definitions of the church found in the pages of Ignatius or Irenaeus, Tertullian or Origen, make any approach to scientific precision.¹

Ekklesia was a Greek word that would have been understood by all who used this universal language in the Apostle's day, as meaning a visible assembly - even after it had acquired a Christian significance. Christianity did not change the meaning of this word but adopted it as a fit description of this divine institution.

It has been further affirmed by Jesse Thomas that "Early Christian literature is equally innocent of any such application of the term."²

Post-Apostolic Development — Only in post-apostolic³ times is there any record of the universal or invisible significance being attached to the word *ekklesia*. This is easy to understand because it is not

¹ John J. McElhinney, *The Doctrine of the Church* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1871) p. 19.

² Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

³ In this connection the term is not confined to a period of church history but applies to any subsequent period after the time of the original Apostles.

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uncommon for a word, at different points in history, to acquire new meanings. To determine, though, what a writer is endeavouring to say, it is necessary to ascertain the meaning of his words, in the day he uses them.

The expression of a "universal", or "Catholic" church was the first new idea to make its appearance after the New Testament age. According to Dr. Fish, this term "first occurs in the year 169 A. D., in the Encyclical Epistle of the Church of Smyrna concerning the martyrdoms of the beloved pastor, the renowned Polycarp. . . ."¹

By this time the New Testament canon had been completed. All of the books of the New Testament were written before 100 A. D. In order to establish historical grounds for the universal church, some archeological or etymological evidence will have to be produced to prove that this definition of *ekklesia* was not post-apostolic in origin.

Historically, the idea of the universal church was a gradual development. In the early period the

¹ Fish, *op. cit.* pp. 33, 34. (Cf, McElhinney, *op. cit.*, p. 27.)

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churches existed and functioned independently of any formal organization into unitary groups. The work of the bishop was confined to a particular assembly but gradually the bishop became overseer over many churches — an abuse that was also post-apostolic.

The notion of an ecumenical church had not ripened into a definite form until the calling of an ecumenical council under the world-ruler - Conatantine.¹ The decrees of this council "were endorsed by the imperial hand, and the church thus consolidated into a world organism."² A natural and later development was the "Holy Roman Empire," and in the end the "Holy Catholic Church" of the present day."³

The term "invisible church" did not make its appearance until the time of the Refomation. When it did emerge, it appears as a counter-invention to the papist claims.

The refomers were justly charged by Bossuet with "the later invention of the notion of an 'invisible

¹ Cf. Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

² *Ibid.*, p. 166

³ *Ibid.*

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catholic' church, as a device to preserve the idea of catholicity without its inevitable implication of external reality."¹

Dr. Maiden attributes the full development of the theory to the period of the Reformation. He claims that "Following the Reformation period and born of the Reformation movement, there emerged a new theory of the church - the universal, invisible, spriitual theory."²

Dr. E. J. Fish, a prominent Michigan Baptist of the last century, sumarized the emergence of this idea, thus:

Martin Luther, denying that the Church of Rome, which had arrogated to itself the title Holy Catholic or Universal Church, was the true church, was asked: 'Where then is it?' He replied: 'It is invisible,' thus originating a designation of the church which was very extensively, I might almost say was universally, ruled the Protestant Christian world until this day. The thought was not new, but the expression.³

It is true that this idea was in the minds of significant medieval Christians, but never formally uttered, "The force of that stray spell, a name,

¹ Ibid., p. 176.

² Maiden, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

³ Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

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remained for Luther to impart."¹

Thus was issued in an era of unprecedented complexity of church concepts. This new name was a convenient designation to justify predetermined conclusions but the novelty only spelled more conflict, a conflict not only between the "local" and "external" universal but an added conflict between the "invisible universal."

The Modern Emphasis. - The modern emphasis of the universal church theory is expressed in two excesses - the interdenominational and ecumenical movements.

An invisible church, contradistinguished from the local church by the adjective "true" becomes a very important concept to all interdenominational activity. It has great utilitarian value, as its theme-song of a great invisible church composed of all Christians is regarded as the only important entity. It thus helps to break down all distinguishing historic principles and beliefs of the separate denominations and bring them together in a new organization, the basis of belief which is the lowest common denominator.

¹ Ibid., p. 41.

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It is easy to see how such a theory or concept, is vital to the continued existence and prosperity of the new "interdenomination denomination."¹

The ecumenical church advocates have just as enthusiastically adopted and vigorously propagated the universal, invisible concept but with the ulterior motive of establishing a world-wide church. The universal church is admittedly the time-honored concept of ecumenicity. *Man's Disorder and God's Design*,² a volume prepared under the auspices of the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches, expresses repeatedly this concept as it is shared by many of its leaders.

Re-Examination of the Apostles' Creed — Repeated reference is made by all advocates of this theory to the Apostles' Creed. In the minds of many people this is regarded as next to final in authority with Scripture. A tradition, now

wholly abandoned as an illusion, credits "each of the apostles with having contributed a clause to it."³

¹ Not a denomination in the sense of organized cooperation, but independent societies with mutual distinguishing beliefs; a label of a kind.

² Published by Harper & Brothers, New York.

³ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

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Dr. Jesse B. Thomas, erstwhile professor of Church History at Newton Theological Seminary, contends that "neither the creed itself nor the emphasized phrase Holy Catholic Church are traceable to the first century."¹

Dr. Thomas's findings in respect to the creed help clarify its authority and show that it is far from a sufficient basis for establishing this proposed church concept. He says:

The creed, in its present form, is affirmed by Harnack to be traceable no further back than to the middle of the fifth century. The 'complete form of the creed,' as Dr. Stimson admits, 'gained general currency in the west' only 'after the eighth century.' The version in use before that time (itself going back only to the third century) omits the word 'catholic' speaking only of the 'Holy Church.' That this was the earlier form is admitted by Romanists as well as Protestants historians."²

It thus becomes obvious that a historical foundation for the universal church theory is lacking. Both the New Testament Scriptures and the earliest Christian documents fail to define the church as "universal" or "invisible."

¹ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 151.

² Ibid.

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PART II

INDUCTIVE INVESTIGATION OF THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH

CHAPTER I

THE FUNDAMENTAL IDEA

The prevailing and fundamental idea of *ekklesia* is that of a local body organized on democratic principles for purposes of worship and services.¹

Having failed to find historical justification for the universal idea of a church, it becomes pertinent that the fundamental idea be positively established.

Importance, and Contribution of the Scientific Method of Approach. — The meaning of most words can be determined by referring to good dictionary but to determine the meaning of *ekklesia* in the New Testament requires an extended study.

The advocates of the universal church theory insists that the word incontinently takes on the sense of an invisible church. Those who hold to the ideal concept assert that the word can represent an ideal assembly. Still others are persuaded that the word is not perverted in New Testament thought but consistently

¹ Dana, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

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and persistently expresses the local idea either in concrete or generic uses.

A few principles of language help make clear what the New Testament is expressing in the use of *ekklesia*.

1. The etymological sense of a word is not necessarily the same as the meaning of the word today. For example, the word "hussy" came from "huswife" which means housewife; today a "hussy" means a worthless woman or girl, or a pert girl. Also, the word "constable" comes from "come stabuli" which means "count of the stable" today this word means "a peace officer."

This principle when applied to *ekklesia*, which is derived from "ek" and

"*calleo*," meaning "to call out" shows the error of trying to establish that *ekklesia* means the "called out ones" as some have supposed, for it has been established that its etymon and meaning are not the same.¹

¹ "There is no foundation for the widely spread notion that *ekklesia* means a people or number of individual men called out of the world or mankind." Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

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Etymology has to be distinguished from meaning. The former has to do with the origin or derivation of a word while the latter indicates that which the word signifies. "Etymology" is the history of the origin of a word whereas "meaning" is what the word stands for in the present. The two may or may not coincide.

2. Since a word may change in meaning or acquire more than one meaning as time passes its true meaning must be determined according to the time in which it was spoken.

In Shakespeare's time the word "deer"¹ meant any small animal; today it means a certain kind of animal. At one time the word "board" meant only a broad, thin piece of wood; today "board" still retains this meaning but it also may mean an official group of persons, or meals furnished for pay for a certain period. This rule applied to *ekklesia* would determine its meaning

¹ But mice and rats and such small deer
have been Tom's food for seven long year.
William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Vol. XV of *The Complete Works of William Shakerpeare*, ed. Henry N. Hudson (Harvard Edition, Boston: Ginn & Company Publishers, 1900), Act 3, Scene 4, p. 92.

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by its usage in the New Testament age.

3. Words may have more than one meaning, therefore the context must determine the meaning in a particular place.

"Organ," for example, may mean a musical instrument or a part of the body. "Bat" may mean a flying creature, a stick used in baseball, or may be slang for a person not well liked. The meaning of a word may be singular, plural or even multiple, such as "strike" which is said to have approximately 31 meanings.

It does not appear, however, that *ekklesia* has any meaning other than that of "assembly," but the assembly may be Jewish, Greek, or Christian.

4. If a word has only one meaning and a writer or speaker wishes to give it a new meaning the context would make it obvious.¹

This rule is well illustrated by Paul's reference to circumcision when he carefully explains that

¹ This is a generally accepted rule of interpretation but few have been willing to apply it to *ekklesia*, preferring rather their own theological distinctions.

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circumcision was not mere mutilation. What had formerly been called circumcision he now brands as concision, and he very plainly introduces a spiritual basis as the designation for the term.¹

In like manner, he explains what he means by "Israel" when he introduces the concept of a spiritual Israel. He says: "For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel."² Here it is plainly indicated by Paul's statement and following discussion that the identity of Israel is not based on blood lines, but on the apprehension of spiritual truth.

It does not appear, however, that *ekklesia* ever acquired a new meaning in apostolic times. It cannot be established that either Christ or the apostles gave it a new meaning. Since it makes good sense to consider *ekklesia* as a local assembly, and there is no explanation of a new concept, the meaning understood by the Greek readers must be accepted as the intended message.

¹ Cf. Phillipians 3:3.

² Romans 9:6. "For not all who are of Israel's race are Israel." Translation by David Smith, *The Life and Letters of St. Paul* (New York: Harper & Brothers, n. d.), p. 427.

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Dr. Broadus, a noted Bible and Greek scholar, discusses this principle to some length when he says:

Now it is a most important principle in the interpretation of language, without the observance of which all interpretation becomes uncertain and unreliable, that whatever is the common and regular meaning of a word, as shown by its origin and general use, must be held to be its meaning everywhere, until there shall be found some passage in which it cannot have that sense. Upon this principle, whether formally recognised or not, scholars are constantly working.¹

In another place Dr. Broadus reiterates this great principle as he contends for the uniformity of meaning of a certain word:

There are some examples in which it might have such a meaning, but none in which it must, for in every case the recognized meaning will answer, and so another sense is not admissible.²

As applied to the case in point the recognized meaning of *ekklesia* as an assembly will fit every instance in which it is used, therefore, it is safe to say the universal idea is not admissible.

5. The definite article "the" with a singular noun sometimes indicates a class or kind of object.

¹ John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Vol I of *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Alvah Hovy (6 vols.; Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), p. 40.

² *Ibid.*, p. 492.

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For example, a sentence which reads, "the elephant is the largest of quadrupeds," in no way limits the elephant to one. In this use "the" is often called the generic article. "The singular number with the generic *the* is practically equivalent to the plural without an article."¹

Dr. Robertson points out that "it is very common to find the singular used with the article in a representative sense for the whole class."² There are many examples of this usage in the Scriptures³ and *ekklesia* is used this way in Ephesians and Colossians.

Evidence Derived from Historical Usage. — In classical Greek *ekklesia* meant "an assembly." Liddel and Scott define *ekklesia* as "an assembly of the citizens summoned by the crier, the legislative

¹ G. L. Kittredge and F. E. Farley, *An Advanced English Grammar* (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1913) p. 77, sec. 174.

² A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), p. 757.

³ Luke 10:7 "*Ho ergates*" is an example where "the labourer" is put in a representative sense. Cf. "*Ho agathos anthros*," "the good man" in Matthew 12:35.

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assembly."¹ This is the classical usage of the word but its meaning "assembly" was adopted for Christian usage.

Dr. Thomas finds evidence that in the classical Greek *ekklesia* is "applied to local self-governing secular clubs or associations,"² as well, as to the political assemblies. No instance has been found, however, of its application to unassembled or unassembling persons.

Thayer defines the meaning of *ekklesia* in the New Testament as "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly."³ This is the literal meaning - assembly - although it is used in different ways.

Dr. George W. McDaniel distinguishes between the Greek usage and the Hebrew usage of *ekklesia*. He says: "among the Greeks *ecclesia* was the assembly

¹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: At the University Press, n.d.), p. 388.

² Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

³ Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, corrected edition (New York: American Book Company 1889), pp. 195, 196.

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of a free city-state gathered by a herald blowing a horn through the streets of a town."¹

The same meaning is brought out as it was used in connection with the Hebrews, as Dr. McDaniel testifies: "Among the Hebrews, *ecclesia* was the congregation of Israel assembled before the Tabernacle in the wilderness by the blowing of the silver trumpet."²

In whatever connection *ekklesia* was used, there is no indication that there was any confusion regarding its meaning.

Norman H. Snaith has pointed out an important rule for determining the meaning of a New Testament word. He says:

It is essential, especially if the word in question is a religious word, to begin with Septuagint, and to notice to what extent Septuagint used the word as the equivalent of the original Hebrew.³

¹ George W. McDaniel, *The Churches of the New Testament* (New York:

Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930), p. 15.

² Ibid.

³ Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 206.

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As he puts it, "The Septuagint Is the Bridge Between the Two Testaments"¹

Applying this rule to *ekklesia* the local idea is unquestionably proved to be the Hebrew idea expressed in *ekklesia*.

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, *ekklesia* is used to translate "*gahal*" which is properly the actual meeting together of the Jewish nation. "*Gahal*" had always a human reference of some sort, gathering of individual men or gathering of nations."²

This word is to be distinguished from *edhah* which "is properly, when applied to Israel, the society itself, formed by the children of Israel or their representative heads, whether assembled or not assembled."³

Both of these words *gahal* and *edhah* refer to the Israelitish community, but it is significant to note that only *gahal* means an assembly of the people,

¹ Ibid., p. 205.

² Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³ Ibid.

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and the Greek equivalent is *ekklesia* which also means "an assembly."

The evidence from this study not only militates against the universal church theory but constitutes a serious objection to any concept of spiritual Israel as being ideally an *ekklesia*.¹ Rather spiritual Israel is an ideal, spiritual *edhah*.

Since the New Testament was written in the koine (common) Greek, *ekklesia* would naturally have the meaning expressed in that language at that time.

Much of the difficulty that has arisen in this study is due to the fact that people have misunderstood the nature of koine Greek.

The New Testament was being written approximately during the middle of the period when this language was used which "is roughly from 300 B. C. after Alexander's death to 330 A. D. the time when the seat of government was set up in Constantinople instead of Rome."²

¹ "For when *gahal* has the broad sense it is never translated by *ekklesia*. But by another Greek word." Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

² A. T. Robertson and W. Hershey Davis, *A New Short Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1933), p. 8.

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It was once thought that the Greek of the New Testament was an "isolated language of the Holy Ghost." Since Deissmann's discoveries in 1895 of a great mass of Egyptian papyri, bearing hundreds of Biblical Greek words, it is now admitted that the New Testament was in reality a common first century Greek.

Dr. J. H. Moulton, the eminent Greek scholar of Britain, has declared:

Tho Holy Ghost spoke absolutely in the language of the people, as we might surely have expected he would. . . . The very grammar and dictionary cry out against men who would allow the Scriptures to appear in any other form than that "understood of the people."¹

Dr. J. P. Free of Wheaton College, outstanding contemporary American archeologist says:

During the last century, it was assumed that many words in the New Testament were peculiar to the Bible, and were not found in the ordinary language of the first century A. D. . . . Some even suggested that words were invented by the New Testament writers so as to convey certain ideas. This, however, would really hinder the message of the New Testament in reaching the people, for they would readily understand only those words which were familiar to them and would have

¹ James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*. Vol. I Prolegomena, 3rd. ed. with corrections and additions (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1919), p. 5.

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difficulty in understanding the meaning of 'invented words.'¹

The archeological discoveries in Egypt in the latter part of the nineteenth century revealed thousands of documents which were preserved in the hot dry sands of that country. The reason that this discovery is so significant is that "these everyday papyrus documents were written in the same type of Greek as used in the New Testament."²

Dr. Free concludes:

This demonstrated that the New Testament was not written in some artificial language containing many 'invented' words, but was actually written in the everyday Greek which would be intelligible to everyone.³

Now, it is pure presumption to attach a new meaning to *ekklesia* unless it first be proved that it had such a meaning in New Testament times. The indication is rather that its meaning was fixed and both Jesus and the Apostles used it in its generally accepted meaning.

¹ J. P. Free, *Archeology and Bible History*, a syllabus prepared for use in Wheaton College, 1945, p. 140.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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Dr. Armitage claims that "Jesus and his Apostles used it with the strictest regard to its etymology, and if we would catch their meaning in its use, we must interpret it by its primitive sense."¹

Jesus used the word *ekklesia* twenty-three times, three times in Matthew and twenty times in Revelation. In all but one of these instances it is generally admitted that he referred to some local assembly. It is then assumed that he gave it a new meaning in Matthew 16:18. The fallacy is obvious. It would not be consistent with His genius as the Master Teacher to use *ekklesia* differently without clearly distinguishing or defining its new use.

In the Greek text of the King James Version *ekklesia* is used 116 times. It is represented by "church" 113 times and by "assembly" 3 times in the English.

In the Revised Version *ekklesia* is used 114 times. One hundred and ten times it is represented by "church"; 3 times "assembly" and once by "congregation."

Even the advocates of the universal church theory must admit that in the great majority of cases

¹ Armitage, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

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ekklesia refers to a local church. There is little or no agreement on the exact number of times.

Dr. Hiscox, of this school, admits of ninety instances where *ekklesia* is applied to a "visible, local congregation."

Concerning the passages which he feels refer to the universal invisible church, Dr. Hiscox says:

And yet it is likely that some of the passages usually thus interpreted might, by a more careful exegesis, be found to bear the primary and literal meaning of a particular congregation. Certain it is that this literal meaning of the word is its first ruling signification, as is certified in a vast majority of cases.¹

Since the Apostle's letters were in the common Greek, what would the people understand by his use of *ekkleiaia*? Unless he attached some differentiating adjective, or explained that he was giving a new meaning to the word they could only associate it with a familiar idea - that of an assembly. But the Apostle did not employ either of these expedients so it must be concluded that the people understood him to refer to the local church in some sense.

¹ Edward T. Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1945), p. 25.

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The significance of all the material introduced in this study so far is that all historical and literal sources are agreed that *ekklesia* means a local assembly. According to the Hebrew thought that is carried over into the Greek, the classical significance of the word, the koine usage, and New Testament usage, there is unanimous agreement that the *ekklesia* is exclusively local in nature.

The Fundamental Idea of "Ecclesia" Misrepresented by "Church." — It is unfortunate that the modern and misleading word "church" has been used to translate *ekklesia*. This Greek word translated in the English Bible as "church" expresses more than the word "church" and yet it limits and defines its boundaries of use more.

An interesting history attaches itself to the word "church." The general agreement among scholars now is that it comes not from *eklesia* but from the Greek *kuriakon*.

Now the word 'kuriakon' is simply the adjective neuter from 'kurios,' Lord, and means that which is the Lord's, that is, the Lord's place, the Lord's house. . . and from that it has been extended to all the various significations which it has

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acquired in the progress of language.¹

Because of the multiplicity of definitions for "church" it is far from accurate in expressing the idea of assembly, for in its meaning today, assembly is only one of its definitions. It may also mean the building in which the assembly meets, the service, the clerical profession, all of one denomination, all professing Christians, all true Christians living, or all true Christians living or dead. And these are only some of the most common meanings.

It would be better if the word "church" were not used in the English Bible. At first the word meant only the Lord's house, the building where the *ekklesia* (assembly) met. It did not translate the word *ekklesia* then, and today it has such a variety of meanings that it is too ambiguous to translate the word even though one of the meanings of the word "church" is assembly.

The English term church, now the most familiar representative of *ecclesia* to most of us, carries with it associations derived from the institutions

¹ E. H. Bancroft, *Christian Theology* (Johnson City, N. Y.: Johnson City Publishing Company, 1930), p. 121.

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and doctrine of later times, and this cannot at present without a constant mental effort be made to convey the full and exact force which originally belonged to *ecclesia*.¹

The word "church" is not in some of the early English versions but the Greek word *ekklesia* is more correctly translated "congregation."

Tyndale's Bible, Coverdale's Bible, Cramner's Bible (The Great Bible) and other versions use the word "congregation."

"Congregation" was the only rendering of *ekklesia* in the English New Testament as it stood throughout Henry VIII's reign, the substitution of 'church' being due to the Genevan revisers; and it held its ground in the Bishop's Bible in no less primary a passage than Matthew xvi:18 till the Jacobean revision of 1611, which we call the authorized version.²

If the King James translators had been left to work independently and unmolested, "congregation" could possibly have continued until this present day. King James sent his translators 15 rules to go by, however. The third rule

stated that "the old ecclesiastical words to be kept, viz., the word church not to be translated congregation." etc."³

¹ Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

² Ibid. p. 2.

³ H. W. Hoare, *The Evolution of the English Bible* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1901), p. 225.

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"Essential Elements of "Ecclesia." - Now then, locality¹ or visibility, and organization are fundamental, to any idea of an *ekklesia*.

It is also necessary to distinguish *ekklesia* or assembly from a mob, company or crowd.

A church is not a mob, or a mass meeting. It is more than a congregation. John the Baptist preached to multitudes and many of the people followed his teaching but they were not a church. They were unorganized.²

Dr. Weston shows how essential the idea of organization was to the assembly or *ekklesia*.

The inhabitants of a city and the members of the *ecclesia* were not the same. Membership was founded sometimes on birth, sometimes on property, sometimes on residence, but the rights of citizenship were always defined and guarded with great exactness and the regulations regarding citizenship were very strict.³

Dr. Armitage concludes:

Of all the Greek terms which designate a calm and deliberative convocation, this was the most appropriate to characterize a body of Christians,

¹ "Locality inheres in ecclesia. There can be no assembly now or hereafter without a place to meet."

² McDaniel, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

³ Weston, *op. cit.*, p. 317.

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charged by their Master with concerns of vast moment. Other words would have carried with them the idea of a crowd, of a show, or of a purely governmental assembly, such as the Senate; having other

elements than that merely of a properly organized assembly.¹

Actually, there is no expediency making it imperative that *ekklesia* be extended to embrace a larger entity or foreign concept of a universal whole, or aggregate of believers. Dr. Thomas has pertinently said:

It does not follow that because a truth or fact is universal in character, it must express itself through a vehicle universal in extent. The law of the heavenly worlds is revealed in the raindrop. The Son of God was 'revealed' in Paul. God is 'glorified' in his individual saints.²

It thus follows that everywhere in the New Testament the undisputed fundamental idea of the *ekklesia* is that of a visible organized assembly.

¹ Armitage, *op. cit.*, p, 119.

² Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 270, 271.
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CHAPTER II

OUTSTANDING MISUNDERSTOOD TEXTS

Matthew 16:18 "I will build my church." - The most outstanding misunderstood text is Matthew 16:18 where Jesus promised, "I will build my church." By these words Jesus was indicating that His institution was distinct from the old congregation in Israel, the Greek *ekklesia* or any institution then in existence. Essentially, he was describing an institution that was and would continue to be his own peculiar possession.

There is no basis for the widely spread idea that Jesus purposed here to build a universal, invisible church. Neither is it "a noble instance of verbal transfiguration" as Dr. Boardman supposes.¹ Rather it is an appropriation of a familiar Greek word, giving it a Christian significance.

Christ found the word with its meaning already fixed. The meaning was suited to his purpose, and he therefore took it and appropriated it to

¹ Cf. p. 12.

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his institution. By the appropriation it did not lose its original signification: its meaning was not changed. It was because it had that very meaning that Christ selected it and applied it to his organization.¹

The usage then, in this passage, is the generic use. Christ simply used the word *ekklesia* as the name of his institution just as the home or school are institutions, and he distinguished it by the personal pronoun "my."

The only other place He used the word in the Gospels indicates the same idea. In Matthew 18:17 the problem of the persistent offender is to be brought before the church. Probably no particular congregation is in mind but even in using *ekklesia* generically he confines its meaning to the local assembly.

Jesus's references to the *ekklesia* in the Gospel of Matthew refer, then, to the divine institution which he originated.

This, as Marsh points out, can be regarded only as local:

And unless we apply the words 'divine institution' to something visible and directly attributable

¹ *Theodosia Ernst* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n.d.) II, p. 91. This is a novel anonymously written to present great church truths.

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to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, they will always be ambiguous and misleading.¹

Galatians 1:13 "I persecuted the church of God." — Galatians 1:13² is another verse cited to support the idea that *ekklesia* referred to the Christian community at large. Careful examination, however, reveals otherwise.

Dr. Hort classifies this as "the original Ecclesia of Jerusalem or Judea, at the time when there was no other."³

Acts 8:1-3, 9:13 and other scriptures confine this persecution to the church at Jerusalem, and these were the saints that he pursued to strange cities.⁴ This persecution "appears to have been limited to the constituency of a single church."⁵

All of this is borne out by Dr. Thomas when he says that "It is a curious fact that there is no

¹ A. H. Marsh, *The New Testament Church* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1898), p. 118.

² Parallel references: 1 Corinthians 15:9, Philippians 3:6. These passages have the definite article.

³ Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

⁴ Acts 26:11.

⁵ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

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proof that Paul's 'persecution' ever went beyond the church at Jerusalem."¹

This verse and its parallel references can be dismissed as references to a single local church.

1 Timothy 3:15 "The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." - Here is another verse that is supposed by some to teach an invisible universal church. This passage speaks of a visible assembly, with rules for behaviour while it is in session — such is impossible to fit the universal church theory. This is a local church which is a pillar and ground of the truth.

It is singular that any reader of this epistle should interpret this personal counsel to a local pastor, as to the proper behaviour of a pastor or his people in relation to the body to which they both belong, as in any way referring to the world church.²

To this Dr. Hort agrees when he admits that the Apostle's idea is "that each living society of Christian men is a pillar and stay of 'the truth' as an object of belief and guide of life for mankind."³

¹ *Ibid.*, p 231.

² Thomas, *op cit.*, p. 232.

² Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

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He asserts that this designation is here given to "a local Christian community."¹

Both "house" and "church" are used here without the article; "it should read, properly, a house of God, which is a church of a living God, a pillar and stay of the truth."²

This more literal reading makes the *ekklesia* indefinite and applicable to every assembly which is a depository of the truth. The precise classification of *ekklesia* in this connection is a generic use.

Hebrews 12:23, "The general assembly and church of the firstborn." —
Whatever *ekklesia* refers to in this verse, it is obvious that it does not refer to a universal, invisible church. Because of the ambiguous nature of this verse it is extremely difficult to ascertain with any degree of certainty just what its use is here.

Dr Thomas classifies this as a reference to the heavenly church as distinct from the earthly church, and irrelevant to any inquiry into the nature.

¹ Ibid.

² Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

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of the present institution. He reasons that "the accompanying mention of the 'heavenly Jerusalem', as well as the words cited, shows that the actual Christian church is not here alluded to."¹

Dr. Carroll classified this use as a reference to the general assembly of Christ which is not in existence now. It is a reference to a prospective heavenly church.²

Many of the later writers have followed Dr. Carroll in this interpretation.

Dr. McDaniel makes a similar designation when he classifies this verse as a reference to "the redeemed of all time."³ He does not mean by this, however, what the universal church theory contends, but qualifies his statement by saying: "It is future, as distinguished from the present church, and institution focalizing and functioning in particular congregations."⁴

¹ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

² Cf. Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³ McDaniel, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁴ Ibid., p. 29.

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An examination of the passage itself reveals a distinction between the *panegyris*, which properly denoted the festive gathering of all the Greek city states, and the *ekklesia*, which denoted an organized business body.

Obviously, this distinction can have only one meaning as applied to the Christian community but consideration must be made of the divergent viewpoints, namely, that it is a reference to a prospective heavenly church, a reference to the church institution, or only a classical use of the word.

Dr. Dana favours this latter view and bases his conviction on the Hellenistic background of the author, together with the description of the events immediately connected.

He objects to the glory church view on the basis of the perfect tense phrases, "Ye have not come" (verse 18) and "Ye have come" (verse 22).

Dr Dana observes:

According to the force of the Greek perfect tense we know that he means a present reality with its beginning in the past. . . . It is rather awkward to think of the church as a present reality in heaven.¹

¹ Dana, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

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Dr. Dana concludes that "the meaning of *ekklesia* here is its common classical sense of assembly."¹

Its immediate association with the first-born, however, militates against this interpretation. It is wholly unlikely that a classical assembly of men would be characterized as first-born, and angels never come under that classification.

Furthermore, the record does not state that the church is already in heaven, but says only that it is enrolled in heaven.

"First-born" is a name that applies to any saved person. The first-born child of a family among the Israelites had certain privileges because he was the first-born, that the children born after him did not have. All saved persons have certain privileges because they have been born again. Whether first in time or last, they still have such privileges as being joint-heirs with Christ, and priests to God. Since the first membership requirement of any New Testament church is to be saved, it is perfectly legitimate to ascribe this title to the church, because those who compose the church are first-born ones.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

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So it is more likely that the reference here is to the church as an institution. This is logically deduced from the fact that the writer is addressing these words to "the several Hebrew Christians congregations."¹

The "general assembly" may be referring to the myriads of angels immediately connected in the proceeding verse.

Kendrick feels that the best construction of these difficult and disputed words is: "And to myraid ones, a festal host of angels, and a congregation of firstborn ones, who are registered in heaven."² He claims that the reason he follows Delitzsch in constructing this passage is that this construction avoids many difficulties "and brings together the angels and the church into a union entirely corresponding to that in which they appear throughout the New Testament."³

¹ Armitage, *op. cit.*, p. 119, 120.

² A. C. Kendrick, *Commentary on the Epistle to The Hebrews (An American Commentary on the New Testament.* ed. Alvah Hovey; Philadelphia: America Baptist Publication Society, 1889) VI, p. 176.

³ *Ibid.*

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Granting that the festal gathering is a description of the myriads of angels, it is logical to understand the author as meaning that any assembly of redeemed people has direct access to the very glorious presence of God and the angels surround the church in its every activity.

This same truth is expressed elsewhere in the Scriptures. I Corinthians 11:10 indicates the presence of angels in the assembly and enjoins that a woman appear with a covering on her head in reverence of them.

At least a hint of this same truth is expressed in Ephesians 3:10 as the principalities and powers witness the expression of the manifold wisdom of God through the church.

Even though the epistle to the Hebrews is not addressed to any particular church, and the author's message is not concerning church truths, an illusion to the New Testament institution cannot be forbidden. Though not specifically applied in this connection to the New Testament institution, it's characteristic constituency of first-born ones must ultimately refer to this divine institution.

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The passages which have just been discussed are not the only

ones used as proof texts for the universal church theory, but they are the ones which are most frequently misinterpreted, with the exception of the references to the church in Ephesians and Colossians which are discussed in the following chapter.

The selection and discussion of these texts has been for illustrative purposes. When the remaining proof texts are examined carefully, they also bear out the local use or one of its logical derivatives.

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CHAPTER III

ECCLESIA IN EPHESIANS AND COLOSSIANS

Preliminary considerations. - Inasmuch as *ekklesia* is supposed by Hort and other scholars to be used differently in Ephesians and Colossians, special study is given to these passages. A preliminary consideration to an understanding of these passages, however, must be understanding and recognition of the nature of the epistles.

The study of ecclesiology in these epistles is not so much a study of church polity as it is a study of the relationship between Christ and His church. This is a vital message of the two epistles. Christ is set out as the pre-eminent one and the church's relation to Him is defined.

A second preliminary consideration has to do with the encyclical nature of the Ephesian and Colossian letters. It is pointed out by the textual scholars that the phrase "at Ephesus" is not in the more

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reliable manuscripts but the epistle to the Ephesians is to be viewed rather as a circular letter. The church at Ephesus was the first recipient of the letter, after which it was shared by the sister churches.¹

The same is true of the Colossian letter as well as certain other of the epistles. The destination of the Colossian letter was all of the churches of the Lycus Valley of which the Colossian church was the more important as regards the content of the letter. All of these churches were predominately Gentile.²

These two factors furnish valuable insight into the usage of the word *ekklesia*. The consideration of these factors coupled with an understanding and

recognition of the varied uses of words shows that these epistles are not a contrast to other teachings but a harmonious, united whole.

Words may be used either in the concrete or abstract sense but the basic meaning does not change because of different usage. A concrete usage confines the subject to time and place whereas an abstract

¹ Cf. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 527, 528.

² *Ibid.* pp. 553, 554.

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usage is confined to generalities. This abstract usage of *ekklesia* may have the sense of designating a kind (often called a generic use), or it may refer to an institution or some similar equivalent idea but the meaning is never changed by a simple change of usage. The abstract usage is essential in many cases for the expression of a thought in a general way without any reference to a particular object. The abstract or generic use of a word, basically, is no different in meaning from its use to designate a particular assembly.

Dr. Strong recognizes this generic use and illustrates it beautifully when he says:

It is only by a common figure of rhetoric that many churches are spoken of together in the singular number, in such passages as Acts 9:31.¹ We speak generically of 'man' meaning the whole race of men; and of 'the horse,' meaning all horses.... So we may speak of 'the American college,' or 'the American theological seminary', but we do not thereby mean that the colleges or the seminaries are bound together by any tie of outward organization.²

¹ Dr. Strong erroneously assumes that this refers to a plural number of churches referred to in the singular. Rather it is a reference to the original assembly at Jerusalem which was scattered by persecution. Cf. pp. 61, 62. His illustrations of the generic usage of word, however, are accurate.

² Strong, *op. cit.*, p. 496.

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The generic use of words is repeatedly employed in the New Testament. A good illustration is found in Matthew 24:32 with reference to "the fig tree." Dr. Broadus clarifies the expressed idea there when he says: "The article 'the fig tree', does not necessarily indicate a particular tree, but may mean only that kind of tree or that class of objects."¹

It is not necessary to add a new idea to *ekklesia* because its expressed

meaning makes just as good sense or better sense than any recent innovations. It should be understood as a generic usage.

Dr. Broadus's criticisms in connection with the word "fulfilled" in Matthew 1:22, which meaning some have tried to change, can be applied to this particular situation.

This serious departure from the etymology and regular use of the word is supposed by such expositors to be required by a few passages in which it is difficult for us to see that there exists the strict relation of prediction and fulfillment. But such passages it will be found, all admit of at least a possible explanation in consistency with the idea of a real fulfillment..., and we have no right to take this or any other word in a sense alien to its origin and use, unless there

¹ Broadus, *op. cit.*, p. 491.

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be found passages in which it cannot possibly have the usual meaning.¹

An examination of the questioned passages in Ephesians and Colossians reveals that the local idea expressed in the generic and institutional usage does make good sense.

Dr. Broadus gives another helpful illustration in this connection in his comments on the "just man" of Matthew 1:19. he says:

The statement has been frequently made (so Chrysostom, Grotius), that the Greek word rendered 'righteous' may signify 'good, Kind,' but it has not been shown to have that meaning anywhere in the New Test., and the common meaning gives a good sense, in either of the above ways.²

Dr. McDaniel illustrates the generic use in the sense of the institution:

The Presidency of the United States is an institution established in the Article II, Section I of the Constitution before there was a president.³

Dr. Dana also recognizes this generic use in connection with Matthew 16:18 as had already been cited. Is there any reason, then why this usage could not be

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

² Ibid., p. 9.

³ McDaniel, *op. cit.*, p 19

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further extended in the epistles of Colossians and Ephesians? This usage alone accounts for the breadth of significance and preserves the essential meaning of the word *ekklesia* which must have locality and visibility.

In these twin epistles of Colossians and Ephesians *ekklesia* occurs thirteen times. Dr. Dana classifies only two of them as local references - Colossians 4:15 and 16.¹ These are definitely concrete usages of the word *ekklesia* referring to the assembly in the house of Nymphas and the assembly of the Laodiceans. This leaves for careful examination only eleven passages that might refer to something other than the local church. They are: Ephesians 1:22, 3:10, 21; 5:23, 25, 27, 29, 32; and Colossians 1:18, 24.

Exegetical examination. - The first passage (Ephesians 1:22) is a section translated with sufficient looseness by the King James Translators and is capable of varied translations. Two ideas stand out in bold relief, however, the headship of Christ over the church and the fullness of Christ appropriated to the body.

¹ Dana, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

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The phrase "gave him as head over all things to the Ecclesia which is His body"¹ (Hort's translation) expresses not only the authority of Christ over all things in general but the special gift of God to the church as the source of all authority, and to whom the church or assembly (as an institution) owes its allegiance.

The reference which makes "His body" synonymous with the assembly will be treated under the subject "The Body of Christ." It will suffice to say now, a qualitative idea is not clearly expressed.

The fullness mentioned here fits neither the universal church theory nor the ideal church theory, but rather is harmonious with the local idea.

The fullness of God is predicatable alike of Christ, of individual Christians, and of the church. 'In Him (Christ) dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,' (Col. II:9). 'Till we all attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,' (Eph. IV:13, cf. III:19). 'The church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all,' (Eph I:23). The fullness of God, then is not limited to the entire host of the redeemed or to any considerable portion of them, but may be

attained by each disciple, just as any number of artists may attain to the fullness of musical or oratorical skill, or any

¹ Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

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number of members of Christ's kingdom may have the fullness of its 'righteousness, joy and peace.' Fullnesses in this sense, is precisely the glorious thought of the Holy Spirit, while a single fullness which must be parcelled out to all the members of the kingdom is a very meager and material view.¹

So it is quite likely that Dr. Fish is right when he concludes that:

A Single fullness parcelled out so as to make the individual man, planet or society, only a fraction of fullness is immensely below the divine conception.¹

Dr. Carroll points out that this fullness "is presently applied, in his prayer, to the particular Congregation,"³ (Ephesians 3:19, "that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.")

All of this agrees with the historical setting of the letter. The Gnostic heresy taught that the "fullness" dwelt only in God. Paul corrects this teaching by informing them the fullness of God was in Christ, the believer, and every lowly assembly.

The second passage in this study is Ephesians 3:10: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and

¹ Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³ Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

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powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

The context and passage itself defines this "church" as the agency through (*dia*) which the heavenly forces could learn of the manifold wisdom of God." Paul's preaching among the Gentiles was to this intent. It is evident that an invisible church, if such a thing existed, could have no mission and would be incapable of being an agency to reveal anything. The passage, though, fits the

idea and function of the local church and it is only logical to conclude that it is a generic use of *ekklesia*, defining and illustrating the work carried on by the institution which Christ founded.

The author of *Theodosia Ernest* presents a rich insight into the teaching of this verse when he contends that the idea here is

that the angels of God, who are elsewhere called principalities and powers, might look at this wonderful contrivance of Jesus Christ for the execution of his laws and the promotion of the comfort and piety of his people, and see in it evidences of the wisdom of God. It was a Divine contrivance, and characterized by infinite wisdom. Nothing else could possibly have done so well. Men have not believed this. Men have all the time been tinkering at God's plan, and

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trying to men it. Men have set it aside, and substituted others in its place; but to the angels it appears the very perfection of wisdom.¹

This same writer illustrates hypothetically the truth of this generic use, in support of his position. He says:

Suppose a friend in England should write to me that he is about to publish a new history of the steam-engine, 'in order that unto kings and princes, in their palaces and on their thrones, might be made known through the engine the manifold skill of the inventor:' what would you think of that man's common sense, even though he was a Doctor of Mechanics, who should insist upon it, that though the steam-engine was a definite and well-known machine, and there were a vast multitude of separate and distince steam-engines, yet there must also be, in some way or other, a vast conglomerated 'universal' engine, consisting of all the steam-engines in the world united into one; or else the language of my friend, when he speaks of 'showing the manifold skill of the inventor' through or by 'the engine,' is altogether unintelligible?²

Dr, Fish also concludes that this is a generic use of the term. He goes on to say:

No one would claim that a single local church could monopolize such glorious work as is referred to, nor could he any more consistently claim that an imaginary collection of churches or the equally intangible kingdom of heaven could effect such

¹ *Theodosia Ernest*, (Philadelphia: American Publication Society, n.d.), II, p. 120.

² *Ibid.*, p. 120, 121.

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results. Reference is clearly had to the Christly elements in men as organized and operative in the church institution, maintaining and representing 'the unity of the spirit' in its seven incomparable points of doctrine and life, building up the individual members as well as the organized body itself into 'the unity of the faith' with whatever additional to 'the unity of the spirit' it may involve, and stretching out by its evangelizing efforts in invincible power and unequalled glory through the world.¹

The third passage of interest to this study is Ephesians 3:21: "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

It would not be very plausible to suggest that this means "believers in the aggregate" or an ideal conception of spiritual Israel. It is rather a parallel to Matthew 16:18, when Jesus refers to his particular institution — the church — and promised that the gates of hades would not prevail against it, and His later promise of being with it through all ages.

This is something that is true of every church and does not need theological interpretations of either the universal church advocates or the ideal church advocates to make it understandable.

¹ Fish, *op. cit.* p. 84, 85.

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True, glory shall be to God 'in the church, in Christ, throughout all ages, world without end,' (Ephesians III:21), but it will be, not in her organized work continued, but in her perfected elements swallowed up in the kingdom which the Son will deliver up to the Father. Armies will disband when the banners of peace crown all the hills. Schools may close when all know the Lord from the least to the greatest. The streams may forget their beds when the floods of glory sweep over the highest mountain peaks, and a redeemed humanity forever float in the ark of God. The church will give glory to God, in the future eternal ages, as the works of the dead who die in the Lord follow them, not as working processes continued, but as beatific results enjoyed.¹

The next five places *ekklesia* is used are in the closely related verses of Ephesians 5:22-33.

Verse 23: "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church." The words *hos kai* (even as) are comparative conjunctions connecting and comparing like things. If a universal husband or wife could be produced it could well be compared to a universal church. A universal church cannot be justified by this scripture on any other grounds.

No one would say that there is only one husband in the world or that the word "husband" has a

¹ Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

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new meaning here of a great, universal, invisible husband, just because "husband" is in the singular and has a definite article before it. This is a generic use of *ekklesia*. It is expressing something that is true of each church.

The wife is put as a representative word. It stands as the general name or title of married women. It does not gather all married women into one immense wife, visible or invisible, 'universal,' but simply means that every wife of the whole multitude has her own husband for her guide, her protector, and her lawgiver, and JUST SO is Christ the head, the protector, the Saviour and ruler of his church. . . .¹

The apostle has made use of this same idea in I Corinthians 7:14 where he says "The unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife." No attempt has been made to prove that this is an immense collective universal husband sanctified by a universal wife. It is universally recognized that each and every unbelieving husband stands in this relation to a believing wife. This same principle applied to the Ephesian letter removes a lot of difficulties.

Verse 24: "The church is subject unto Christ." This again is an abstract usage of the word *ecclesia*

¹ *Theodora Ernest*, (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n. d.) II, p. 126.

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in an institutional or generic sense. Any New Testament church is subject unto Christ, so no interpretation makes better sense than that the church referred to here is an institution. The fact that it is referred to in the singular with the definite article does not teach that there is just one "true church."

Verse 25: "Christ loved the church." This is a parallel to verse 23 which has already been discussed. It is also closely bound together with what follows.

What is said in these verses is applicable to one church as another, just as what is said of the marriage relation is equally applicable to all husbands and wives, or just as what is said of man would be applicable to all men in a sentence which should read: 'Christ loved man and gave himself up for him.' And this is the generic use.¹

Now consider both verse 25, and verse 27 ("a glorious church") in the light of Acts 20:28. Here a local church, the church at Ephesus, is described as the "church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." What is said here in Ephesians about Christ loving the church and giving himself for it "that he might present it to himself a glorious church"

¹ Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

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is not distinguished from what is declared in Acts 20:28 concerning the Ephesian church. The Apostle would have all of the churches realize that this truth is equally applicable to them, therefore he refers to the *ekklesia* generically.

Nor is this glorious redemption limited to the churches. Individual believers are spoken of as being redeemed by the blood of Christ and purified as well as are churches, but what the Apostle is explaining here is the relationship of the church to Christ as an embodiment of spiritual power. In fact, the New Testament nowhere makes an exception to the responsibility of church membership. The question of heretical churches had not yet arisen and so all Christians, if faithful in their duties of promoting the Kingdom of God, would have voluntarily united with the agency divinely ordained for the promotion of the Kingdom. Hypothetically, all Christians would have been in a church. Separation from the church would be abnormal in the Christian experience. The apostle is treating a general truth and does not have to explain any exceptions.

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Dr. W. H. H. Marsh, an advocate of the invisible church admits in connection with his passage (Ephesians 5:26-27):

It is true if the passage cited from Ephesians and others of similar import 'are carefully examined in their connection, it will be seen that they may be applied to any particular church; for Christ is head over all things to each.'¹

Verse 29 continues the same thought already set out in verse 27, concerning

Christ's love for the assembly, and admits of no necessity for a new meaning. Paul employs an illustration from the inherent nature of man to show how Christ loved the church. "For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourished and cherished it, even as the Lord the church."

Verse 32 concludes the uses of *ekklesia* in Ephesians. The explanation of the foregoing verses clarifies this one also. This is the generic use and refers to each church.

The passages in Colossians containing *ekklesia* are practically identical in their associations with those already discussed in Ephesians. Since both passages in Colossians containing *ekklesia* are

¹ Marsh, *op. cit.*, p. 124.

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connected with the "body," a more complete discussion of these passages will be given in the section on "the body of Christ."

Colossians 1:18 contains a generic use of the word *ekklesia*. Jesus is the head of each church as has already been pointed out in Ephesians 1:22. Again the Apostle employs the familiar figure of a head and body. The ambiguity of this figure is made sufficiently clear in Romans and I Corinthians where in the same language a local church is called a body.

Body, like its cognate term embodiment, looks not toward the inward, unorganized and spiritual, so much as toward their enshrinement in the outward, organized and tangible.¹

The ideas implied by the use of the word "head" are such as fit only the local institution. Christ is the head of every particular church in which alone the institution expresses itself, in that he is not only the sovereign ruler but the source of growth and life through vital connection with Him.

This idea of headship is not confined to the church, generically speaking, but is elsewhere applied

¹ Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

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to the principalities and powers — He is the Head of every 'principality' and 'authority'.¹

Colossians 1:24 is also a generic use. What is said in this verse is true of each church. Paul suffered what he did for the churches.

The "church" of this verse is further defined by ascertaining the nature of "the body of Christ" which follows in the next chapter.

This conception of the *ekklesia* in Ephesians and Colossians does not indicate that people outside of the church will not be saved. The Apostle uses a broader figure to describe the saints in the aggregate. In Ephesians 3:15 Paul speaks of the "whole family in heaven and earth." This family includes all believers (Galatians 3:26) Men are born into the family of God but are admitted on the suffrage of the members into the church.

Realizing the importance of the *ekklesia* in the New Testament, theologians and expositors have tried to place all saved people in this church. This is not necessary since they are clearly defined as in

¹ Smith's translation of Colossians 2:10, *op. cit.*, p. 561.

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the family and kingdom of God. Some of Christ's people "are even in the realms of Antichrist himself; for he says, when mystical Babylon, drunk with the blood of the saints, is about to be destroyed, 'come out of her, my people, lest ye be partakers of her plagues.'"¹

This interpretation of Ephesians and Colossians no doubt seems far-fetched to the twentieth century mind, but nevertheless, it seems to be the sole apostolic conception. It is only because ecclesiological thought has been saturated with the universal invisible church concepts that such a difficulty exists. Indded, as has already been shown, this seems to be the only concept of apostolic times.

It is safe to dismiss all of these references to the *ekklesia* in Ephesians and Colossians as generic references. Since this is a possible explanation which makes good sense, an additional meaning to *ekklesia* (one contrary to its fundamental idea) is not admissible.

¹ *Theodosia Ernest* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n. d.), II, p. 127.

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CHAPTER IV

THE RELATION OF THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH THEORY TO OTHER DOCTRINES

The error of the universal church theory is not confined to the nature of the church, but vitally affects other important teachings of the Scriptures. This theory promotes a misunderstanding of the "body of Christ," "union with Christ," "Spirit baptism," "the Kingdom of God," and the biblical record concerning the "founding of the church."

When these subjects are approached with the universal church theory as a basis for their interpretation they will always become misleading. By discarding this theory these important doctrines take a new form and proclaim a vital practical message.

The body of Christ. — A study of the body of Christ is closely bound to the other figures used of the church. The most important of these are "temple" and "building" which will be explained under this heading.

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There also seems to be much confusion surrounding this subject, especially in the selection of proof texts. Ephesians and Colossians are chiefly relied on by the universal church advocates. Again, there are different conceptions as to what constitutes the body. In most cases it is treated in a materialistic fashion.

Some people feel that this figure of the body refers exclusively to what they call the "mystical Body of Christ." It is generally conceded, however, that the local church is a specialized localization or manifestation of the universal body.

Dr. W. R. White adopts a different view and distinguishes between a functioning body and a forming body. He says that "all Christians are numbered with that accumulating body of Christ which is unassembled - that congregation of Christ which is not yet congregated."¹ They are only "members in prospect."² of a future church. The functioning body is composed of "only baptized believers in the fellowship of a local body, having the New Testament as its law and only law."³

¹ White, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

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This functioning body then is local and multiple. All believers "are in the forming but not the functioning body,"¹ according to Dr. White's view.

Dr. Dana's conception of the body of Christ, is an "ideal, spiritual body in sacred and vital connection with Christ its divine founder as its head."² A serious difficulty with his view here is that the only Scripture that mentions Christ founding a church is Matthew 16:18 which Dr. Dana admits refers to the institution of the local church.

Dr. Hort's conception of the body of Christ is:

To each local Ecclesia St. Paul has ascribed a corresponding unity of its own; each is a body of Christ and a sanctuary of God: but there is no grouping of them into partial wholes or into one great whole.³

Joseph Cross, an Episcopalian, in a book of sermons entitled *Coals from the Altar*, emphatically rejects this idea of an invisible church and mystical body of Christ. He says:

¹ Ibid., p. 54.

² Dana, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

³ Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

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We hear much of the invisible church as contradistinguished from the church visible. Of an invisible church in this world I know nothing, the Word of God says nothing; nor can anything of the kind exist, except in the brain of a heretic. The church is a body; but what sort of a body is that which can neither be seen or identified? A body is an organism, occupying space and having a definite locality. A mere aggregation is not a body; there must be organization as well.¹

The ideas expressed by the figure "body" make it an inappropriate term to designate any so-called invisible church. Dr. Conner points out that "the function of the body in relation to man's spirit is to objectify and make visible his inner life. So the church makes Christ visible to man."² This comparison is subject to disputation but even if it is correct it is only meaningful when applied to a local church.

This mystical interpretation is frequently regarded as the only possible interpretation. A careful examination, though, reveals many difficulties with this theory and admits of two other more plausible interpretations.

¹ Joseph Cross, *Coals From the Altar*, cited in Roy Mason, *The Church That Jesus Built* (6th ed. n. d.) pp. 55-6.

² Conner, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

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First, when the Apostle speaks of the body, he may be speaking figuratively of an intimate relationship between Christ and the church.

The author of *Theodosia Ernest* adopts this view in interpreting "the body." He says:

Each and every true Church of the whole multitude of Churches is connected to Christ by a union so intimate and tender that it resembles that between the husband and the wife; and, indeed it is as though every Church were a part of his very self, 'bone of his bone,' and 'flesh of his flesh.'¹ view in interpreting "the body." He says:

A second more plausible interpretation is that the Apostle is speaking possessively, and this is in accordance with his other uses. (Romans 16:16 — "The churches of Christ salute you;" I Corinthians 12:27 — "Ye are the body of Christ.")

The qualitative idea is usually used to explain the genitive case used with reference to "his body."² This construction would indicate that the body is a part of Christ — a picture incongruous with the body described in I Corinthians 12.

¹ *Theodosia Ernest* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, n. d.), II, p. 126.

² Ephesians 1:23, Cf Colossians 1:18, 24.

[p. 94]

But this could just as well be a possessive genitive construction. In fact, it is more likely to be because the qualitative genitive is a rare construction in Greek grammar in comparison to the possessive genitive which is its most common use.

The grammatical construction "body of Christ" is not different from the grammatical construction "Kingdom of God"; yet no intelligent person would call this a qualitative genitive construction indicating a pantheistic conception of a kingdom that is actually God. It is a kingdom which he owns and over which he rules.

The fact that local churches are called bodies indiscriminately, thus

emphasizing each as a distinct body proves that the term "body" can be used in a representative sense.

In view of what has already been said about the singular being used with the article in a representative sense for the whole class, it is clear that the scope is not limited to a particular object but refers to the whole multitude of separate congregations.

It is especially interesting to note that the Colossian church was called a body of Christ, since

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this is one of the epistles that is supposed to teach an invisible church.

Colossians 3:15: "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (members of the Colossian Church¹) "to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful."

A better rendering of the phrase "one body" is "a body," a rendering that is commonly accepted by scholars.² The reason for this is that *heis*³ is sometimes used in Greek for the indefinite article. Since the Greek language has no indefinite article, "the best that the Greek can do is use *heis* or *tis* in a weakened sense."⁴

Colossians 1:18 and 24 must be considered in this light. If there is an essential unity to Paul's teaching, his idea of the body is harmonious.

Paul has declared that there is "one body."⁵

¹ This does not mean that the message was exclusively for the Colossians, but it was equally applicable to every church which received the letter.

² ". . . Better to read "in a body," i.e. to be members of a body. . . ." Dr. Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

³ Greek for "one".

⁴ Robertson and Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 274.

⁵ Ephesians 4:4.

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This statement must be considered as indicative of a class. If there is a functioning body and a forming body, the Scripture is inaccurate in its representation of "one body." Local churches are definitely declared to be independently existing bodies, which fact decidedly conflicts with the theory that they are merely manifestations of a larger body.

Dr. Fish supports this with his argument that "if the Colossian church was one body, by implication the Ephesian or any other Church was another."¹

The passage concerning the Corinthian church is even more explicit in defining a local assembly as a body, since there is no definite article before church. I Corinthians 12:27 "Now ye are a body of Christ and members in particular."

Here evidently it is the Corinthian community by itself that is called "a body of Christ." This depends not merely on the absence of an article but on *humeis* which cannot naturally mean 'all ye Christians.'²

Because of the widespread misunderstanding of this subject, careful consideration should be given to

¹ Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

² Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 145, 146.

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this section (I Corinthians 12:12-31 and the "body" it describes.

Besides the two reasons cited by Dr. Hort there are other indisputable evidences that this "body" is a local church.

The different parts of the body that are mentioned refer to part of the head, and they are so represented as being on earth. According to the invisible church theory the head is represented as distinct from the body.¹ Here the body is represented as a united whole with "ears," "eyes," "feet." These are the "particular members" of this divine organism — a local church. This passage eliminates any foundation for a distinction between the church as an organism and the church as an organization as contradistinguished from each other. A local church is of necessity both an organism and an organization.

Furthermore, it is a body which is visible and which is entered by baptism.²

¹ Cf. I Corinthians 12:16-18.

² Paul "implicitly taught his heathen converts to believe that the body into which they had been baptized was itself the Ecclesia of God." Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 108.

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The passage also speaks of members of the body which are "more feeble" and of those "less honourable" and of "uncomely parts." This is a description of members within a local church. It would not fit the picture of a mystical body. In such a body there could be no such distinction among the members because

it is supposed to be invisible.

Furthermore, the passage refers to a body capable of being rent by schism or division. A universal, invisible church or body would be incapable of being rent by such division.

Author W. Pink feels that this is conclusive evidence that the body mentioned is a local church. He contends:

But in the church which the Apostle is contemplating in I Corinthians 12: there was schism (I Corinthians 11:18 etc.) Therefore it is proof positive that it is the local church, and not the church universal which is in view in I Corinthians 12.¹

A final observation on this passage concerns the suffering of a member and its effect upon the body. This too is something that cannot possibly describe a

¹ Author W. Pink, "Does I Corinthians 12 refer to the Universal Church or to the Local Baptist Church," *Faith and Life*, XIX (January, 1946), p. 3.

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universal church as Dr. Pink points out:

Is it true that whenever a believer in Christ in India or China (of whom I have never even heard) suffers that 'all the members,' all believers in America suffer with it or him? Certainly not. But it is true ideally, and often in experience, that when one member of the local church 'suffers' all the members of that local church suffer too.¹

In Romans 12:3-5 the same truth is expressed. The central verse is, "As in one body we have many members, and all the members have not the same office, so we the many are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another."

Dr. Hort feels that "the ideas are essentially the same"² here as in I Corinthians 12.

Here the language used is not formally applied to the Roman community in particular; but the context shows that St. Paul is still thinking of local communities, and of the principles which should regulate the membership of the Roman community, as of all others.³

The figure "body" is consistently used by the Apostle throughout the New Testament to represent a local church. There is not sufficient evidence to

¹ Ibid.

² Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

³ Ibid.

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indicate a broadening of the term in Ephesians or Colossians to include all Christians. As has already been observed it is used in Colossians 3:15 to represent an individual church.

When the Apostle refers to "the body" or "one body" he is either using the word generically or referring to a specific body representative of a class.

In Ephesians 4:11 the Apostle tells of the officers appointed by the Lord for the purpose of "perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." All of these purposes are suitable to a local situation but are unintelligible when applied to anything broader. Only a visible assembly of believers could be edified and this is what Paul meant.

This same idea is continued in verse 16 which speaks of "the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." "Edification" is clearly and

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uniformly set forth in the New Testament as the function of the assembly."¹

The strongest indication of any qualitative idea regarding the body of Christ is in Ephesians 5:30: "For we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones." The two latter phrases "of his flesh," and "of his bones," however, are omitted in Nestle's edition of the Greek New Testament, Westcott and Hort's edition of the Greek New Testament, and the American Revised Version. The reason for this is that the better manuscripts do not contain these phrases and their authority is at least questioned.

But, suppose they are a part of the original manuscript. The conclusion is not irresistible that they are expressing a qualitative idea. They may be only figures of speech to indicate the intimacy of the relation between Christ and the church which he instituted. In the verses immediately following, Paul uses the figure of the marriage relationship to illustrate how intimate is this relationship.

¹ Cf. Thomas *op. cit.*, p. 273.

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Some people understand the references to "a great mystery" in the following

verses as indicating something incapable of being understood, which would support their "mystical" argument. This is not necessarily true because a mystery in biblical usage is not something incapable of being understood but a previously hidden truth. It had been hidden in God in all past ages, but through his chosen steward, he turned light upon this mystery. After the Apostle revealed Christ's relation to the church by divine revelation it was no longer a mystery.¹

The above mentioned references to the "body" are not the only ones, but they are understanding examples to illustrate how the Apostles uses the term.

Most people find it difficult to associate in their thinking an identification of the local church as the body of Christ. Their objection is that Christ would have many bodies. This problem arises, however, from the fact that the qualitative idea of the body has so long been considered as a necessary corollary doctrine to the universal, invisible

¹ Cf. David Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 320.

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church. Nevertheless, the Scriptures teach otherwise and each local church is in itself conceived of as a body of Christ.

Other figures are used as synonymous with the body and the assembly such as "building," "household," "temple," etc. But all of these figures are local and confirm the one meaning. They are all local, but it is tautological nonsense to say so.

Of particular interest is the figure "temple." Many people do not understand how such a lofty figure can be used of the local church, but the fact remains, it is so used. It is also used as a figure for the human body. (I Corinthians 6:19), but never of an invisible entity.

The figure is applied to the Corinthian church in I Corinthians 3:16: "Know ye not that ye are a sanctuary of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you."¹

Here, Dr. Hort says:

The individual local community is itself addressed as a sanctuary of God; and the same conception, if we are not to disregard both grammar and natural sense, is expressed with great generality in Ephesians II:21 f. . . .²

¹ Translated by Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

² Ibid.

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He says in conclusion:

Indeed, if I mistake not, the thought of a universal spiritual temple of God is, to say the least, not definitely expressed anywhere by St. Paul.¹

The Revised Version translates the phrase "all the building" as "each several building." This translation represents each different "building" or assembly as developing into a "temple."² Then the figure "temple" gives place to the figure "body."³

The examination of these figures which represent the assembly in Ephesians and Colossians show that they support the local idea of the church.

Union with Christ. — This subject will be investigated because so many have approached it from the universal church standpoint.

The perceptions gained from considering what union with Christ means from the standpoint of a local church concept do not take anything away from the

¹ Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

² "Just before this he had written of the church as an institution or abstractly, in which Jew and Gentile are made into one. But the abstract becomes concrete in each several buildings." Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

³ Ephesians 3:6; 4:4, 12, 16, etc

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glory of this doctrine; rather they magnify it.

Union with Christ is most commonly set out by the term "in Christ." Some preliminary considerations clarify the relation of the churches to this doctrine.

1. Individual believers are regarded as having their position "in Christ." "There is therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."¹

2. Local churches, in the plural, are said to be "in Christ." "And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ."²

3. A local church at a given place has its position "in Christ." "Paul, and Silvanus, the Timotheus unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ."³

Since the Thessalonian church enjoyed this position it is quite reasonable to conclude that all of the New Testament churches enjoyed the same position. This union was a result of their faith, and Christ was in them as churches just as much as he is in the

¹ Romans 8:1. Cf. John 14:20; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

² Galatians 1:22. Cf. I Thessalonians 2:14.

³ Thessalonians 1:1. Cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:1.

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believer. Conversely, the same is true. The different churches are in Christ as well as are the individual believers.

It is folly to try to define the nature of this union. No one is competent to explain the manner in which a man is in Christ or Christ is in man. The same thing applies to His union with the churches. The vital truth is that a sovereign, gracious God has produced the union. It is not necessary to force this union with Christ into a materialistic pattern, such as is expressed by the figure "body." To do so presents great difficulties.

If this union does take the form of a body as such, it would have to be a "spirit body." This contradiction of terms is an impossibility. The material and immaterial parts of man are distinguished by the terms "body and "spirit." A "spirit body" is as much an impossibility as a "round square," "a present past" or "two parallel lines which intersect." These are logical impossibilities because the ideas denoted by the predicates are contradictory to the ideas denoted by the subject.

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It is true all Christians will some day possess a "spiritual body,"¹ but this is not the same as the concept of a "spirit body." This spiritual body will be a glorified body capable of visibility and of being handled, the same as was Christ's resurrection body.

Another passage closely knit to this teaching of union with Christ is the intercessory prayer of John 17, in which Jesus prays for the unity of all believers. This passage can be twisted to teach several different things but is not contradictory to what has already been said.

An understanding of the phrase "one as we" makes the whole section illuminating* A. W. Pink analyzes the phrase in this manner:

This refers not to a manifestation of ecclesiastical oneness, rather it is a oneness of personal knowledge of and fellowship with the Father and with the Son, and therefore oneness in spirit, affection

and aim. It is a oneness which is the outcome not of human agreement or effort, but of Divine power, through making each and all 'partakers of the Divine nature.'²

¹ I Corinthians 15:44.

² A. W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Swengel, Pa.: Bible Truth Depot, 1945), IV, p. 100.

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There is a sense in which the Saviour's petition has already been granted. Acts 4:32 states that "the multitudes of them that believed were of one heart and one soul." But it has a double fulfillment or a continuous fulfillment."¹ Among the real people of God there is a blessed underlying unity respecting the essentials of the faith. This lowest common denomination should never be made the basis of church polity, but nevertheless it does show that there is a divine, intimate, unbreakable relationship between Christ's people.

In the latter part of the chapter Christ seems to have in mind a future manifestation of this unity which will make the world realize that the Father has sent the Son. When this unity is manifested it will include all of those who will believe on Him.²

The time of this future manifestation will probably be at the return of Christ since only then will Christians be made perfect.³

¹ "The union referred to is the consequence of 'glory given' to us. . . . Our spiritual union is begun now, but it only attains its full fruition in the life to come." Pink, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

² John 17:20.

³ John 17:23, Cf. I John 3:2.

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Union with Christ can be defined only in personal terms. The believer is represented as having his position "in Christ." That concept which makes the believer a part of a separate entity is a misinterpretation of union with Christ.

This union is everywhere represented as an inscrutable union. It would be presumptuous to make this consonant with the so-called "Mystical Body of Christ." This does not mean that the individual believer or the corporate body of believers, which constitute a local church, are not vitally united to Christ by faith. It does mean that the manner of this union is incapable of mechanical definitions. It means that to man only the fact is revealed, not the fashion.

Union with Christ indicated a unique relationship. It connotes the full

identification of the believer or church with Christ in the totality of His death, burial, resurrection, and triumphant life - a connotation that requires no universal church theory to make it meaningful.

There is something far more mysterious about union with Christ than can be explained in mechanical

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terms. "Your life," says Paul, "is hid with Christ in God."¹ So the believer not only is in Christ by a vital union based upon faith but he is also in some way identified with the Heavenly Father.

"Union with Christ" is a doctrine that needs careful examination, but it is presumptuous to assume that it is in conflict with the clear teaching on the nature of the church.

Spirit Baptism. - The Baptism of the Holy Spirit is an important feature of the proclamation of a universal church - more so by those affected with interdenominationalism than by the ecumenical wing. It is also an important characteristic of the majority of the smaller sects in America.

The chief tenet of this theory is that all believers are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the "mystical body of Christ."

The battle ground for controversy on this subject is I Corinthians 12:13: "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to

¹ Colossians 3:3.

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drink into one Spirit."

Two interpretations are possible here. The first is a view set out by A. W. Pink. He carefully explains the significance of *pneuma* which is translated "spirit." According to his view the English capitalization is misleading since there was no capitalization in the Greek text. It is "a question of exposition and interpretation, not of translation in any wise,"¹ whether or not *pneuma* is to be considered the Holy Spirit.

The Greek word *pneuma* has varied uses in the Bible. It may denote the "spirit of man," the "Holy Spirit," or it may be "also employed psychologically."² There are many cases where this is true and a special illustration is the phrase in Philippians 1:27, "stand fast in one spirit." Here

"Spirit," "has the force of oneness of thought, accord, object."³

. . . . No matter what our nationality — Jew or Gentile — no matter our local standing — slave or

¹ A. W. Pink, "Does I Corinthians 12 refer to the universal church or to a Local Baptist Church?", *op. cit.*, p. 2.

² *Ibid.* p. 2.

³ *Ibid.* p. 3.

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free men — all the members of the local church have been baptized 'in one Spirit' — that is, in one mind, purpose, accord, and there is therefore oneness of aim for them to follow, oneness of privilege to enjoy, oneness of responsibility to discharge. Furthermore, they are said to 'drink of one spirit' — that is, they one and all appropriate (symbolized by 'drink') the oneness of spirit.¹

The possibility that the preposition "*en*" should be translated "in" instead of "by" and other factors favor this view. There is one serious objection, however, namely, that the contextual references to the Spirit undoubtedly refer to the Holy Spirit. It does not necessarily follow that these succeeding references to the "spirit" have to refer to the Holy Spirit since verse 12 begins a new section. But it is a more reasonable assumption that this personal idea is directly continued.

A consideration of these factors makes the following interpretation seem to be the most logical and scriptural view.

This second view has been expressed by different writers T. P. Simmons states it briefly:

This passage means that being in or under the power of the Holy Spirit we were all brought by

¹ *Ibid.* p. 3.

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the Lord to baptism, and thus were made members of His body the local church. Thus baptism is the ceremonial door into the church.¹

Neither of these views admit of the possibility that this is a mystical spirit

baptism, in both cases it is not Holy Spirit baptism at all but water baptism.

Four other considerations establish the truth of this statement.

1. Whenever the New Testament speaks of baptism without anything in the verse or context which expresses otherwise, it is always water baptism which is in view.

2. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was a special act which enabled the unbelievers to witness the power of God.

John predicted to those whom he immersed that one would come afterward and immerse them in the Holy Spirit and fire.² If this is applicable to Christians today, where is the immersion in fire? There is nothing about those predictions that indicates something mystical, but rather something real and visible.

¹ T. P. Simmons, *A Systematic Study of Bible Doctrine* (Russell, Ky.: The Baptist Examiner, 1948, 2nd ed.), p. 344.

² Matthew 3:11.

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This was fulfilled at Pentecost when the people were enveloped by the Holy Spirit and "cloven tongues like as of fire. . . sat upon each of them."¹ When there was a Holy Spirit immersion it was stated in unmistakable language and distinguished from water immersion, such as at the house of Cornelius in Acts 10:44-48.

3. The Apostle Paul emphatically declares that there is "one Lord, one faith, one immersion." If there is also the abiding act of immersion in the Holy Spirit, besides the perpetual ordinance of immersion, then there is not "one immersion" but two.

The believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and infilled but not mystically immersed. The Bible should not be interpreted mystically or figuratively, unless there is absolute necessity, that is, when the context compels it.

4. The classification of this as mystical Spirit baptism makes the Holy Spirit both the administrator and the element, an assumption nowhere sustained in the New Testament.

The limitation of the "body" to a local church

¹ Acts 2:3.

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which has already been ably demonstrated by Dr. Hort forbids any notion of a mystical Holy Spirit baptism being taught in I Corinthians 12:13.

The one passage around which has been built a theory of mystical baptism fails to support the claim of those who have so ardently propagated the theory,

The Kingdom of God. — A common feature of the universal church theory is the identification of the Kingdom of God with the church of God. This cannot be said to be unanimous among the advocates of the theory but it is generally characteristic of the universal church dogma. When a distinction is made, it is usually "a splitting of hairs," rather than a recognition of the broad differences.

Nevertheless, the New Testament makes a broad distinction between the Kingdom and the church. The Kingdom, admittedly, is universal and invisible,¹ but the church is local and visible.² All that is said about the Kingdom leads to the conclusion that it "neither is nor was it intended by human agency ever

¹ Matthew 24:14; Luke 17:20.

² Acts 18:22; Revelation 2:1.

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to be made, an external or discernible earthly entity.¹

For a long time in the beginning of the Christian era, there was no confusion concerning the identity of these two separate entities. This important observation is conceded by Dr. R. Newton Flew when he says: "It is remarkable that in the first four centuries of the Christian era the identification of the Church with the Kingdom of God on earth is nowhere made."²

Regrettably, though, this distinction did not long continue, as Dr. Hort, points out:

Since Augustine's time the Kingdom of Heaven or Kingdom of God, of which we read so often in the Gospels, has been simply identified with the Christian Ecclesia.³

Most people have been satisfied with such an explanation but Dr. Thomas justly condemns this identification on the following grounds:

. . . . The word *ekklesia* would call up, in the mind of an ordinary Greek, or Greek-speaking person, a conception not only not identical with, but in every particular the antithesis of, that suggested by the word *basileia*.⁴

¹ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

² R. Newton Flew, *Jesus and His Church* (New York: The Abington Press, 1938), p. 30.

³ Hort, *op. cit.* p. 19.

⁴ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

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The proper meaning of the two words does not justify this identification, *Ekklesia* meant an assembly, whereas the concept of the Kingdom corresponded to the *basileia* which was universal.

This is recognized by Dr. White when he says:

"It is very interesting to note that when the Holy Spirit chose a special word with which to designate the New Testament church, he selected the Greek assembly idea instead of the Roman Empire view."¹

Dr. Hort recognizes the wide difference between the church and the Kingdom and points out that there is no ground for making them synonymous:

But we are not justified in identifying the one with the other, so as to be able to apply directly to the Ecclesia, whatever is said in the Gospels about the Kingdom of Heaven or of God.²

In order to rightly understand the nature of the Kingdom of God, a distinction must be made between the two. Nevertheless, the relationship of the church institution to the Kingdom of God must be recognized. Dr. Fish points out this relationship.

It is no dim and unimportant reflection of the kingdom, but, possessing the best elements of

¹ White, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

² Hort, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

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the kingdom, is, under God, the organized power by which it is to be extended to the ends of the earth.¹

The founding of the church. — As has already been observed, it is affirmed by some of the universal church advocates, that the church began at Pentecost. This particular of the theory is more or less confined to the dispensational

school, and its belief is not so generally adopted as the major parts of the theory. Nevertheless, for this study, it is important to give it consideration.

To say that there was no church in existence before Pentecost is to ignore the clear activity, and recognition of a corporate society before this event.

It appears that the church received the commission,¹ had a prayer meeting,² and elected a treasurer prior to the Pentecostal experience.³ Then on the day of Pentecost three thousand people were added.⁴ It is a mathematical necessity that something previously existed, else there could not have been something added to it. All of these factors indicate the existence of

¹ Matthew 28:16-20.

² Acts 1:14.

³ Acts 1:23-26.

⁴ Acts 2:41.

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a working organization.

It is not clear that the Christian institution was not already in existence when Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." It is certain that it was not a literal prolongation of the Jewish church because of the contextual elements.

This does not mean, however, that Jesus had not begun to build His institution. It is quite possible that its germinal beginnings are recorded in Luke 6:12-17. The whole scene implies a called out assembly in that only twelve of His many disciples formed the initial group — these "He named apostles."¹ Thus, they were more than called out ones because all of His disciples were this, but the twelve were a called out assembly of the called out ones.

It may be that this is what Paul is speaking about when he says that "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues."²

¹ Luke 6:13

² I Corinthians 12:28.

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This conclusion is not irresistible, however, because it is equally as possible a reference to importance of place as it is to a reference of priority in time.

Dr. Flew points out that "the choice of twelve men in itself implies the beginning of an organization."¹

Much ambiguity surrounds the verb build (*oikodomaso*). Thayer defines its meaning as "to build" but thinks that it means "to found," as Jesus uses it here. There can be no serious objection to its primary sense "to build" as Hort points out:

The primary sense of *ekklesia* as a congregation or assembly of men is not altered by the verb "build" . . . associated with it. . . . To speak of men as being built is in accordance with the Old Testament usage.²

The real difficulty with the verb is whether it expresses point action or linear action. Both are possible, but the linear action idea conforms to what has already been said. In this way it would best be translated — "I will be building my church."

The universal church advocates have attempted

¹ Flew, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

²Hort, *op. cit.*, pp. 15, 16.

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to place all saved people in the church. But they seem to have forgotten about the Old Testament saints by setting its "birthday" at Pentecost. To be sure, the necessity for placing all saved people in the church does not exist.

The often used expression "the birthday of the church" serves no practical purpose, but rather serves to disguise or abolish the important truth that Jesus brought into existence during His earthly ministry an institution which would perpetually promote the ends of the Kingdom of God.

It must be obvious now that church concepts serve as a basis for interpretation of many scriptural teachings. A convenient device for settling difficulties is to interpret them according to the most popular theories but the answers usually are far from exact.

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CONCLUSION

False assumptions. — Besides trying to base the universal church theory on certain proof texts there are two arguments from reason that are sometimes used as accumulative evidence for this theory. In reality they are nothing but false assumptions.

The first of these arguments is, that since the majority of Christians believe in a universal church, therefore, there must be one.

The weakness of the arguments immediately appears, but J. B. Moody answers it more fully:

All the world, in all the ages, could not change the meaning of the word of God, not even by universal usage and legislation. Nay, let them seal their perverted meanings with the blood of millions of martyrs, yet the true meanings are written in heaven, and were written from heaven, and they will judge us at the last day.¹

The decisions of the mob can not be rightly interpreted as the voice of God.

There was a time when the greater part of

¹ J. B. Moody, *My Church*, pp. 66, 67.

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Christendom injected into its theological dogma the theory of evolution, but now the facts of science have accounted for its abolishment in conservative circles.

Likewise is the postmillennial view of eschatology:

The postmillennial view has prevailed through the centuries since Augustine. . . . Most of the older theologians taught it, e, g., Strong and Hodge. It was believed by many sincere and earnest Christians, who were earnestly striving to bring in the Kingdom of Christ. The great missionary movement of the early 19th century was largely postmillennial in its outlook.¹

This decay of the postmillennial view in favor of premillennialism and amillennialism illustrates the possibility of the masses being wrong.

A second false assumption is that since the greatest Bible teachers, theologians, and expositors teach the existence of a universal church, therefore, there must be one.

This is a ridiculous assumption because no mortal man is competent to

determine who is the greatest. Some "little" preacher laboring in relative obscurity may be just as great as those exalted by

¹ H. C. Tenney, "The Second Coming." *Faculty Bulletin of Wheaton College*, X, No. 9, (May 1947), p. 28.

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the praise of men. In fact, some who are unknown may have better theology and be better teachers and expositors than those who extolled, yet, the Lord has kept them thus in order to produce some choice fruit for His glory.

The anti-universal church school, however, is not devoid of great scholars. Dr. Jesse B. Thomas is probably the most outstanding in this field. He was a professor of Church History in the latter part of the nineteenth century at Newton Theological Seminary and was as nationally known as Henry Ward Beecher and others. Furthermore, he is noted for his conservative stand against the intruding tide of modernism. Thoroughly scholarly, logical, and fundamental is his work *The Church and the Kingdom*.

Dr. E. J. Fish has promulgated his convictions on the nature of the church in his great work *Ecclesiology*. He was one of the great leaders of Michigan Baptists, being "three times elected President of the Michigan Baptist State Convention, and was for many

¹ One of the best books ever written on the nature of the church.

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years a valued Trustee of Kalamazoo College.¹

It is significant that both of those men were prominent Northern Baptists, although Southern Baptist are usually associated with an anti-universal church concept. And there have been some great Southern Baptist scholars who have reacted against the universal church theory, such as B. H. Carroll, formerly of Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

He throws light on this subject when he says that "all the intelligence, piety, sincerity and scholarship of the world are not monopolized by any one age, nor by any one denomination."²

Destructive Implications. — The destructive implications of the universal church theory are bound to produce a serious effect upon Christianity and especially the work of the churches.

Dr. B. H. Carroll observes:

All teachings in the direction that there now exists a general assembly which is invisible,

¹ Cf. M. E. D. Trowbridge, *History of Baptist in Michigan* (Published under the auspices of the Michigan Baptist State Convention, 1909), p. 248.

² Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

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without ordinances, and which is entered by faith alone, will likely tend to discredit the particular assembly, which does now really exist and which is the pillar and ground of the truth.¹

The theory of a universal church encourages disloyalty to the local church. Since the local church is subordinated, the only logical outcome is a subordinate interest in it. J. B. Moody illustrates the disaster of this position when he says:

Introduce your wife as your local wife, and see what will happen. She would think that she was the contemptible, little wife, while the big one was somewhere else. And mind you, every time a man speaks of the 'local church,' he has in his mind a big church, compared with which the local is a contemptible, little thing. Hence, all such must despise the Church of God, because they subordinate it to another, which is not another. No error ever did more to destroy Church Loyalty.²

F. J. Huegel expresses it quite well when he says, "It unhinges"³ a believer in his relationship to the church as a visible organization. Being an advocate of this erroneous theory, he feels it justifiable for a believer to assume such an attitude. He says:

¹ Carroll, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

² J. B. Moody, *My Church*, pp. 68, 69.

³ F. J. Huegel, *Bone of His Bone* (5th American ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), p. 109.

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His attachment to the true Church, which is the mystic - Body of Christ, becomes so deep and so real, that he feels himself somewhat detached from the visible Church as it has been organized (perhaps I should say disorganized) by man.¹

Such an attitude is characteristic of those who are enrapt in the universal

church theory. The local church becomes meaningless and of little or no significance in the economy of God.

An observation of the churches where this theory has been propagated shows how the error can set aside the work of the church and in its stead, "societies," "leagues," "clubs" etc., have sprung up to take the place of the church.

Dr. Thomas observed of his day:

A noteworthy phenomenon of the times is the rapid multiplication of newly invented schemes for the prosecution of work alleged either to have been left undone by, or not to be within the province of, the individual church.²

That was thirty seven years ago. The situation is much worse today and the present trend will probably continue.

Actually, there is no phase of mission work

¹ Ibid.

² Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

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which the churches cannot carry out either cooperatively or independently. Some have tried to improve upon the method inaugurated by Christ, but the net effectiveness of their work cannot be determined. The church was the choice of Christ as an agency for promoting the ends of the kingdom and it has not failed but rather has stood the test of time. Should a church deteriorate into being only an agency for social good, it does not mean that the church is not the best method for the work of evangelism. Instead of inventing novel contrivances, other scriptural churches should be organized to carry on the work.

If our Lord intended the local church to be the normal object of personal affection and field of personal activity, we must look with jealousy upon any actual rival, whether or not rivalry be admitted or disavowed.¹

The propagation of this theory has laid the groundwork for the ecumenical movement. Now liberal ministers have adopted this concept, so long considered evangelical, for their own ends. This has afforded them a powerful tool so that in less than 50 years the prospect of a super church organization is plainly

¹ Ibid.

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indicated on every side.

Once this becomes a reality, true New Testament Christianity will be swallowed up. Since the early beginnings of modern ecumenical movements, Dr. Thomas was gifted with an insight into their erroneous assumptions and fervently denounced them. He says:

The often urged notion that a 'united front' of Proteatantism against Romanism, or of Christianity against heathenism, will be irresistible, is itself a relic of heathenism. It is the old 'trusting in horses and chariots,' which the Scripture condemns.¹

Critical observations. — Some people will dismiss this whole controversy as "a play upon words," or a striving "about words to no profit." Some acknowledge this distinction between the church and any broader significations but can see no harm in using a false name.

This argument may seem plausible but it is not very respectful of divine revelation. Christ said: "If a man love me, he will keep my words."² This peculiar expression does not leave room for sentimentality to decide the issue.

¹ Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 308, 309.

² John 14:23

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We cannot suppose that our Lord, or his apostles under his guidance, selected loosely the terms which were to be of so large significance in directing the development of the new movement. . . . If we can be certain what words he used, and the precise idea he intended to convey by them, it will be presumptuous and hazardous to substitute new names or intrude new meanings into the old.¹

Just such a misuse of titles brought about the outstanding evils of the heirarchical system. In the New Testament, the leader of a local church was called a "bishop." Through the appropriation of new titles such as "priest," "high priest," and "lord bishop" the original duties of the office have been perverted and destroyed.

Dr Thomas truly observes:

The Pope's claim to be Pontifex Maximus is the logical outcome of the reckless disregard of authoritative Scriptural precedent in the use of titles.²

A consideration of these facts will remove any flippant attitude toward the problem. A study of the history of baptism brings out the same truth, so that at the conclusion of its long history baptism "no longer suggests to the average pedobaptist the

¹ Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 290. ² Ibid. p. 291.

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faintest hint of its New Testament meaning."¹ And this controversy which has so divided Christianity is the outcome of a misnomer.

Either the theory of a universal church or the doctrine of the unity of the Scriptures will have to be abandoned in order to reach a consistent position. This theory is actually opposed to the unity of the Scriptures. It proposes that both Christ and Paul glided from the "universal" to the "local church" meaning without even projecting a differentiating adjective into the text. Dr. Fish points out in this connection:

The New Testament is utterly innocent of the inward conflict of those theories which adopt both the invisible, or universal as it is now more commonly called, and the local ideas. It is everywhere self-consistent.²

He goes on to affirm:

. . . It must be apparent to everyone that ideas so different from the local cannot dwell harmoniously with it in the same system. We know how the Catholic or universal has warred against the local, staining centuries with the blood of the contest.³

¹ Ibid.

²Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

³Ibid., pp. 75, 76.

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Edward P. Marshall also shows how the prominence of a universal church brought great evils and determined to a large extent the course of history. He says:

It was the degradation of the local church and the exaltation of the Universal Church body politic that has been the cause of the death of thousands of the choicest Christians men and women that ever graced the annals of the world's history.¹

The universal church theory is used as a weapon for proselytes, who say that

the universal church is the important church — thus attempting to substitute a unity of Christendom for the unity of the local body mentioned In the Scriptures. By so doing, these proselytes have so depreciated the local church institution that they fail to have respect for it.

And is it not an historical fact that, since Protestant Pedobaptists invented this idea of a non-existing, invisible, universal spiritual church, to offset the equally erroneous Romanist church, of a present visible, universal church, reverence and honor for God's New Testament particular church have been ground to fine powder

¹ Edward P. Marshall, *A Treatise Upon Baptist Church Jurisprudence* (Washington, D.C.: The Columbian Publishing Company, 1898), p. 103.

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between them as between the upper and nether millstones?¹

Too many people have bent over backwards to introduce mysticism into the practical teachings of Jesus and the Apostles where the Scriptures context does not allow it.

It is obvious that an adoption of this persistent local use that has been presented will set aside the theories of the church which have mainly ruled the Christian world, to fall back upon that which rules throughout the New Testament.

It would also "put a strong hand upon that conflict of the times and materially modify many current opinions and usages."¹ This is sorely needed to restore respect to the glorious institution — the church, an assembly of immersed believers.

With all respect for the scholarship of the men who have held otherwise, in fidelity to an omniscient Saviour the "universal invisible church theory must be set aside as a human theory. All such theories must be regarded only as the cobwebs which

¹ Fish, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

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truth brushes away in order to prepare the church as a suitable habitation for God through the Spirit. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

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APPENDIX

The following outline is offered in explanation of every use of *ekklesia* in the New Testament.

I. Secular Uses (4).

Acts 7:38 – The Jewish assembly in the wilderness.
Acts 19:32, 39, 41 – The Greek assembly.

II. Singular Uses – Location Indicated (17).

Acts 8:1 – at Jerusalem
Acts 11:22 – in Jerusalem
Acts 13:1 – at Antioch
Rom. 16:1 – at Cenchera
Rom. 16:5 – in their house
I Cor. 1:2 – in their house
I Cor. 16:19 – at Corinth
II Cor. 1:1 – at Corinth
Col. 4:13 – in his house
Philemon 2 – in thy house
Rev. 2:1 – in Ephesus (R.V.)
Rev. 2:8 – in Smyrna
Rev. 2:12 – in Pergamos
Rev. 2:18 – in Thyatira
Rev. 3:1 – in Sardis
Rev. 3:7 – in Philadelphia
Rev. 3:14 – in Laodicea (R.V.)

III. Singular Uses – Location indicated in context (24)

Acts 11:26 – assembled themselves with the church – Antioch.
Acts 14:27 – gathered the church together – Antioch (Acts 14:26).

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Acts 15:3 – brought on their way by the church – Antioch (Acts 14:26, 15:3)
Acts 18:22 – saluted the church – Caesarea.
Acts 20:17 – called the elders of the church – Ephesus.
Acts 20:28 – to feed the church of God – Ephesus (Acts 20:17).
Rom. 16:23 – of the whole church – assembly that met in home of Gaius.
I Cor. 6:4 – least esteemed in the church – Corinth.
I Cor. 10:32 – nor to the church of God – Corinth.

I Cor. 11:18 - when ye come together in the church - Corinth.
 I Cor. 11:22 - despise ye the church of God - Corinth.
 I Cor. 14:4 - edifieth the church - Corinth.
 I Cor. 14:5 - that the church may receive - Corinth.
 I Cor. 14:12 - to the edifying of the church - Corinth.
 I Cor. 14:19 - in the church - Corinth.
 I Cor. 14:23 - the whole church be come together - Corinth.
 I Cor. 14:28 - in the church - Corinth.
 I Cor. 14:33 - in the church - Corinth.
 Col. 4:16 - in the church - Laodicea.
 I Thess. 1:1 - unto the church - Theassalonica.
 II Thess. 1:1 - unto the church - Theassalonica.
 III John 6 - before the church) v.1. probably
 III John 9 - unto the church) the church in
 III John 10 - casteth them out) Gaius house
 of the church. (Rom 16:23)

IV. Singular uae distinguished by "every or "no." (3)

Acts 14:23 - ordained elders in every church.
 I Cor. 4:17 -I teach everywhere in every church.
 Phil 4:15 - no church communicated with me.

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V. Original asembly in Jerusalem (11).

Acts 5:11	Acts 15:22
Acts 8:3	I Cor. 15:9
Acts 9:31	Gal. 1:13
Acta 12:1	Phil. 3:6
Acts 12:5	Heb 2:12
Acts 15:4	

VI. Plural Uses (35)

Acts 15:41	Gal. 1:2
Acts 16:5	Gal. 1:22
Rom. 16:4	I Thess. 2:14
Rom. 16:16	II Thess. 1:4
I Cor. 7:17	Rev. 1:4
I Cor. 11:16	Rev. 1:11
I Cor. 14:33	Rev. 1:20a
I Cor. 14:34	Rev. 1:20b
I Cor. 16:1	Rev. 2:7
I Cor. 16:19	Rev. 2:11
II Cor. 8:1	Rev. 2:17
II Cor. 8:18	Rev. 2:23
II Cor. 8:19	Rev. 2:29
II Cor. 8:23	Rev. 3:6
II Cor. 8:24	Rev. 3:13
II Cor. 11:8	Rev. 3:22
II Cor. 11:28	Rev. 22:16
II Cor. 12:13	

VII. Generic usage in the sense of an Institution (20).

Matt. 16:18	I will build my church.
Matt. 18:17a	tell it unto the church.
Matt. 18:17b	if he neglect to hear these church.
I Cor. 12:28	God hath set some in the church.
Eph. 1:22	head over all things to the church.
Eph. 3:10	might be known by the church.
Eph. 3:21	glory in the church.
Eph. 5:23	Christ is the head of the church.
Eph. 5:24	as the church is subject.
Eph. 5:25	as Christ also loved the church.
Eph. 5:27	present it to himself a glorious church.
Eph. 5:29	even as the Lord the church.

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Eph. 5:32	concerning Christ and the church.
Col. 1:18	the head of the body, the church.
Col. 1:24	which is the church.
I Tim. 3:5	take care of the church of God.
I Tim. 5:16	the let not the church be charged
I Tim. 3:15	the church of the living God.
Heb. 12:23	and church of th« first-born.
James 5:14	call for the elders of the church.

VIII. Uses omitted by the Revised Version (2).

Acts 2:47 — the Lord added to the church (at Jerusalem).

I Pet. 5:13 The church that is at Babylon.

The King James version has 116 uses of *ecclesia* while the Revised Version treats only 114 of these as reliable. The total number of 117 as given by some writers is probably due to the inclusion of "robbers of churches" in Acts 19:37. Here, however, the word is not *ekklesia*, but *hierosulos* which means "temple robbers." In none of these 116 instances it is necessary to make *ekklesia* mean something different. Its recongnized meaning of a local assembly, in some sense, makes plain the precise idea of Christ and His inspired apostles.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to set out the problem of the nature of the church and to present a consistent answer to the problem.

In establishing the problem, the method of approach has been (1) to set out the universal, invisible church concept, (2) to present and critically examine representative opposing views, and (3) to show the absence of historical justification for any view other than the local.

In attempting to present a positive and consistent approach to the problem, the universal church theory has been examined (1) in the light of the fundamental idea of *ekklesia*. (2) by a careful exegesis of its major proof texts, and (3) by pointing out its misinterpretations of related doctrines.

The author's conclusion is that the universal, invisible church concept should be regarded merely as a theory because sufficient evidence is lacking to establish it as a fact.

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