

THE CHURCH VS. SOCIETIES.

PAPER READ BY BRO. E. J. GRANT AT THE CARLETON COUNTY BAPTIST QUARTERLY MEETING, AND PUBLISHED BY THE EXAMINER'S REQUEST OF THAT BODY.

If there is any fact of history that cannot be disputed; that never has been disputed by any body, or sect of Christians, it is the fact that Christ established a Kingdom in the world, that that Kingdom has an outward visible form, or better perhaps, visible local organizations, which are in the New Testament designated by the word "Ekklesia" and properly translated church.

"The church," says Dr. Harvey, "is the visible earthly form of the Kingdom of Christ, and is the Divine organization appointed to its advancement and triumph. Organized and governed by the laws of the invisible King, and composed of the subjects of the heavenly Kingdom, who by the symbol of fealty, have publicly professed allegiance to His churchly fidelity regarding that Kingdom, and in receiving authority to establish under inspiration, the form and order of the church, received the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Wherever they gathered disciples they organized a church, and at their death left this as a distinctive and only visible form of the Kingdom of Christ on earth.

Thus divinely constituted and inspired the church is God's organization in which the Holy Spirit dwells and from which divine spiritual forces go forth to transform the world from sin to holiness, to subject it to the will of God. "The Kingdom of God shall not prevail against it, but through it as the medium of God's power, the grand visions of ancient prophecy predicting the triumph of the Messianic Kingdom shall find realization in human history."

We ask, then, whether the church as divinely constituted, is adapted to all ends, and to the accomplishment of the ends which its Head and Founder had in view, or has the changed conditions of society, the restlessness of the age and the influence of the sciences, and the spiritual things rendered necessary other agencies and organizations, better adapted to the work of evangelization in this changed condition of things? Does the church need to be supplemented by other societies in order to achieve the best possible results, is there any department of Christian work being organized or effected, that does not come within, or is not fairly covered by the church as constituted by our Lord?

If so then let us seek to know what that department of work is, and let us by all means meet that necessity by the best organizations we can possibly form.

But if on the other hand, this divinely authorized and divinely constituted organization has anticipated all possible demands and provided for all possible conditions of society, then it is clearly unwise to attempt to supplement it, and any such effort, however fair, it may promise at the beginning, must in the end weaken and render less effective the one and only God-given institution, the church of Christ.

The church is divinely constituted; possesses all the functions and facilities necessary for self-government, for inward spiritual development; and for outward self-enlargement.

The church is a Self-disciplinary Society. If any of its members conduct themselves in a manner inconsistent with the Christian profession and loving efforts on the part of individual brethren fail to bring them to a right spirit; then the church as per Matt. xviii: 17, and its action is final, carrying with it the authority of the Great Head of the church.

The church is a Mutual Education Society. Paul certainly advances this idea, when in his letter to the Ephesians, he says, "From Whom (i. e. from Christ) the whole body (i. e. the church) is fitted 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. The reference here is doubtless to the growth and development of the inner spiritual life of the local church, and there is no hint at distinction between old and young, male and female, but the very opposite. They are not to work apart but "fitted together" so that the older may be stimulated by the enthusiasm and buoyancy of the younger, and the younger guided and helped by the ripe wisdom and richer experiences of the older members. And hence any outside organization which tends to separate the members of the church, or doing any part of the church's work, must, in the end, weaken and render the work less effective, because of departure from the divine plan.

The church is a Benevolent Society, and under the shadow of its wings it is to do its utmost in rendering material assistance to any of its own members, or others who may be in need of such help. When the church of Jerusalem was in need of help, the apostle wrote to the church at Corinth, pointing out its duty in the matter. If he had known as much about ways and means as some Christian workers now know, he might have written Sister Priscilla to organize a Thrift Society, and to Brother Stephanus to form a Relief Society, with the assurance that he would, in this way, awaken greater enthusiasm and secure better results than is writing to the church as such.

But Paul knew nothing of such methods, and so he wrote as follows: "Now, concerning the collection for the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him." And what he wrote, he wrote under inspiration of the Holy Spirit; hence for all time to come, we can be confidently assured that if the apostle were living and writing today, he would recognize no society other than the church itself for doing the church's work.

The church is a Missionary Society. And she cannot and dare not hand over her great responsibility, her sacred trust, to any other society. Her commission is "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." If money must be raised in order to obey the

Lord in carrying out this last command, it is to be raised by the church as such, and not by outside, humanly constituted societies, whose running expenses must necessarily consume money that belongs to the Lord, and should be expended in prosecuting the work which He has laid upon the church.

This is equally true of local mission work. If the church is located in a community where mission work needs to be done, when such work can possibly be done, surely it is the duty and privilege of this divinely authorized missionary society, as such, to undertake, and faithfully and faithfully to prosecute her God-given mission.

Such a sacred trust needs the best wisdom, experience, and diversified gifts of the whole body, and if trusted to any other society, it cannot be so well done. It is strange, indeed, that any Christian could fail to see that the organization of any kind of a society for doing Christian work, is not only an injury to, but also a reproach upon, the church of Christ.

The church is not a Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor, it is true. But it is a Christian Endeavor Society, every member of which, old and young, rich and poor, is bound by its allegiance to Christ, the Founder of the Society, and by his covenant of membership in the society, to endeavor, in every possible way, to cooperate with all the other members in the development of the inward spiritual life of the body, and in promoting its outward self-enlargement.

Yes; but, said a pastor to me, not long since, "in my church there are a lot of old members, who do not attend the meetings, and I have a number of young members who are willing and anxious to work; am I not, therefore, right in organizing them into a Christian Endeavor Society?"

My answer is, decidedly No. In organizing the young into any kind of a society for Christian work, you are doing a wrong both to the older and the younger members, by separating those whom God intended should be "fitted together" in the great work.

In doing so you are acknowledging your own inability to organize and lead the Lord's army in solid phalanx against the enemy, and this is doing yourself a wrong, if you have been called of God to the work.

No, the church itself is a divinely authorized and a divinely constituted society for doing every kind of Christian work that can possibly need to be done, and for the execution of her great mission she has been divinely officered, and equipped.

When He ascended, upon high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. He gave to the church apostles and prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. What for? To organize societies and multiply machinery? "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (i. e. the church itself), till we all come in the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

We take the ground, therefore, that all societies for doing Christian work other than the church itself, should be discouraged for the following reasons:

1st. They are not needed. If it be true that the church itself is a divinely authorized society, perfectly adapted to the prosecution of every department of Christian work, then it must be clear to all who will think of the matter, that other societies are needless, and he who attempts to justify their existence, will be under the necessity of showing that the church is not perfectly adapted to all departments of Christian work. Until such a case shall be made, in doing this, we cannot be driven from the position here taken.

2nd. They encourage that which the Word of God manifestly discourages, i. e., class distinctions in the church.

In the Bible idea of the church, there is neither old nor young, male nor female, rich nor poor, high nor low. "It is the household of God, Jesus Christ Himself being the Chief Corner, in whom all the building is fitted together growing up into a holy temple in the Lord. But it will be clear to anyone who will look at the matter with unbiased mind, that the organization of certain classes of the church membership into distinct and separate societies must tend to weaken and disjoint this divine compact which the Lord would have remain, "fitted together" and so grow into an unholy temple in His name.

Let all the brethren of one faith in any given community organize themselves into a general Missionary Society, all the sisters of the same faith organize themselves into an Aid Society, and all the young people—whether Christian or not—who incline to the same doctrinal belief, organize themselves into a Christian Endeavor Society, and what further need have you for the church organization?

You have then three humanly constituted churches instead of the one divinely constituted church. And this for the past twenty years has undoubtedly been the tendency of things.

Let the growth continue along the same line for the next twenty years, and it is not at all impossible that the condition of things above described may be a fact and not a fancy.

We have the assurance, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church. Let us see to it that the gates of heaven do not prevail against her."

3rd. These societies must of necessity weaken the sense of loyalty and responsibility to the church, which should characterize every member. Individual members of these societies may deny that this statement has been true in their own experience. But any number of such denials would not prove to a thoughtful person that the tendency of the principle involved is not in the direction here indicated. It must be so in the nature of things. I meet a young brother and say to him, "Well you have joined the Christian Endeavor Society, I understand." Yes. And you are doing Christian work from the standpoint of your membership in that Society? Yes. But you were a member of the church for some years before you joined the society? Yes. Did not your membership in the church place you under the most sacred obligation to do the very work which you are now doing because you are a member of the society? Well, yes, I suppose it did. Still you did not do the work because you were a member of

the church, but you are now doing it because you are a member of the society. If that is not disloyalty to the church and if it does not tend to lessen the sense of responsibility which membership in the church is supposed to involve, then I shall be obliged to acknowledge my stupidity.

But suppose the young brother should contend that he did just as much work before he joined the society as after, then it is manifest that he should not have joined it, for now he must divide his loyalty and devotion between it and the church.

But it is argued that if the pastor keeps an eye upon all the work of the society, he can easily prevent any of the evils here pointed out. To which we reply, Why organize a society for doing the church's work, which requires the cooperation of the past to prevent the development of its acknowledged evil tendencies?

If the pastor has not wisdom enough to organize and lead the church as a whole, he will not likely have enough to prevent the growth of the inherent evils of a half-dozen societies.

4th. The organizing of human societies for doing the church's work is a reflection upon the wisdom of the church's Lord. If He had thought other societies than the church, necessary, He would doubtless have made a provision for such organizations of the past to prevent the development of its acknowledged evil tendencies. He has not done so, it is manifest that He considered the organization whose principles are present in His teaching, and afterward formulated by inspired Apostles, was all that was necessary for the carrying on of His work in the world, and that the best of men, even the wisest leaders among us, when we ask them to admit that the Lord's way of doing things is probably wiser and better than their own.

Yes; but, says the objector, Your theory is disposed of by the practical working of these societies. The results of the organization have been increased enthusiasm, greater earnestness and activity in the Lord's work, meetings more largely attended, and greater readiness to take part; members of the church who never did much before, are now at work.

Very good, we say; but if this new zeal has been generated, this unusual enthusiasm awakened, these new signs of life created, simply by the introduction of some novel method, and not by an increase of piety and spiritual power in the hearts of the members, what is the use of the organization? The results of the organization have been increased enthusiasm, greater earnestness and activity in the Lord's work, meetings more largely attended, and greater readiness to take part; members of the church who never did much before, are now at work.

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With regard to all such hollow enthusiasm as is being awakened to-day by mechanical means and novel methods, I think I hear the Lord saying, as of old: "To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? . . . I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; I delight not in the blood of bullocks or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required that at your hand, to tread my courts?"

Thirty, forty, and fifty years ago, before the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts, were among us, the blood of bullocks or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required that at your hand, to tread my courts?"

For a number of years past the Report presented to the convention of the state of the denomination, has lamented the small increase in our church membership, and the general lack of spiritual power among the members. During these years, outside societies for doing church work have been rapidly increasing in number, and glowing reports of their great utility come to us from time to time; but still the spiritual death of the churches continue. Our Sabbath-schools, with few exceptions, run themselves as they please, the churches having neither control nor interest in them. Societies multiply, an artificially-created enthusiasm abounds, the energy and ingenuity of pastors are taxed in originating new methods of so-called church work, and in suggesting new wrinkles for social and literary entertainments; but in spite of all this outside bustle and flourishing of trumpets or rather believe because of these things, God is displeased. His blessing is withheld, and the churches languish.

All such innovations and institutions, I believe, are an abomination in the sight of God, because they are a reflection upon His divine wisdom, in that they undertake work which He has committed to the church. The wisdom of organizing other societies than churches, for doing the church's work, is, in our judgment, about equal to the wisdom of building a wheelbarrow with which to do the work of a lightning express.

If we desire a return of the old-time revivals and mighty displays of God's saving power, our desires will not be realized by organizing societies and multiplying machinery, but by a return to the old paths, by honoring God's own institutions and ordinances by hearty consecration of our church membership to God's service, by fervent prayer and humble reliance on the energy of the Divine spirit accompanying the simple, direct presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who will still the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

By your permission, Mr. Editor, I will send you, as soon as convenient, a review of the model constitution of the Y. P. S. C. E.

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Nettie's Conquest.

ERNEST MEAD.

"A little child shall lead them." "Uncle, don't you have family worship?" Ernest Mead's eyes dropped, and he strove to evade the direct question of the little one perched upon his knee by calling attention to some robin in the garden. Ornithology was his hobby, and had he known how to adapt his knowledge of his numerous pets to the comprehension of his little niece, he might have succeeded in banishing, for the time being at least, the subject which called forth her question. But Ernest Mead was a bachelor who never went in to society and had until recently a delicate and their hazy answers and sang praises to God, for the lost was found, the wanderer reclaimed. Proud, stern Ernest Mead bowed humbly at the feet of Jesus.

The church was crowded. The ordinance of baptism is always regarded with interest; but this was a peculiarly happy occasion, and the minister's eyes glowed with a holy light as he announced his text, "A little child shall lead them." There were only two candidates; but as the choir sang, "Just as I am, without money and without price, the sinners led down into the water a man past the meridian of life, and a six-year-old child, there was not a dry eye in the church.

"What!" you say, "receive that baby into church fellowship?" Why not, my friend? Would you prefer to overlook the wisdom of Him who has seen fit to hide these things from the wise and prudent, and reveal them unto babes?—National Baptist.

"Mamma did." No sooner had the words escaped the child's lips than a tear fell from Ernest Mead's eyes to the little hand on his cheek.

"What makes you cry?" does something hurt you?" was the ready query as the tiny arms were clasped about the neck of the child pressed that of the bearded man.

Ernest Mead's thoughts went back to the time when the mother of this little one shared his life so fully that their joys and sorrows were one. Indeed, it was Ernest, because I love Howard more; the best that Charles and Mary Lamb could not have loved each other more devotedly than this brother and sister. But one summer a handsome stranger came to the village and won the affections of the fair young lady. "I do not love you less, Ernest, because I love Howard more; please do not blame me," she said, as she told her brother of their betrothal, dwelling, as young ladies are apt to do, upon the peculiar merits of her hero.

Let me keep my own place Ruth. I think I love you too truly to mind being second," was Ernest's loyal answer. And with her head resting upon her brother's shoulders she averred that his place in her heart should be kept sacred.

But her lover watched with jealous eyes the devotion of another and sister. To his narrower vision, it seemed incredible that such a love could exist without detracting something from his share of her affections, and emphatically rejecting the proposition that they all share one home, removed to a distant country with his bride, taking care to prevent as much as possible intercourse between brother and sister.

Ernest Mead pined so continually for his sister's companionship that in three years he seemed to have aged ten. Then he sought solace in his books—those true friends which so often afford strength and comfort to the weary and oppressed, and for five years studied the best authors with a spirit of earnestness that would have shamed many of our college students. One day, while busy as his work, a telegram was in his hand which stated that by a terrible railway accident his sister and her husband had lost their lives. The husband had died instantly and Ruth lingered only long enough to request that her brother be sent for and to write faintly on a slip of paper, "Ernest, I leave my baby to you, and in doing so die happily."

So the little one whose life had been spared by being left at home with her nurse instead of accompanying her parents, was brought to the home by her bachelor uncle, and a straightway she, that little six-year-old one, became mistress of that establishment, masters and servants alike doing obedience to her will. And now she has asked a question which the ministers in the town would have shrunk from putting to Ernest Mead. "Was it the Spirit of God speaking through the little one, when she asked me? One thing is certain: his heart softened as the cheek of the child pressed his own, and after only a few moments' silence he asked tenderly, "Nettie, what is family worship like?"

"There was something so pure and artless in the astonishment of the child as she put the question, "Uncle, do you know?" that he felt constrained to answer truthfully, "I have never been in a home where they have family worship, Nettie; how did mamma do?"

"She read verses out of the Bible, and then we knelt down while she prayed." "Who was in the room when you had it beside you and mamma?" "The servants." "Don't papa read or pray?" "No; mamma always did."

He remembered how his sister had written him of her conversion and that she had made no allusion to her husband, and wondered if her married life had been a happy one. At any rate, she had been a faithful mother, for it was evident from the intelligent answers of her child she had been carefully instructed; and now this child was his; he never felt his own weakness so much.

"I don't know how to pray," confessed the man whom the world called "learned."

"I can say, 'Now, I lay me,' was the eager reply. And again the tears came into Ernest Mead's eyes. He pressed the child to his bosom, and he carried her out into the garden; and as they plucked the flowers, he said to her merrily that he caught the infection and more than once joined her.

"Only listen to Mr. Meade; he's not like the same man since that child came," said Betsy, the cook, to the household.

"She's doing what nobody else under the sun could do, makin' a better man of him," was the reply.

"A happier man you mean, Eliza; he always was good enough."

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eyes raised to his. He arose, walked across the room, took from an upper shelf a long-neglected Bible, resumed his seat and lifted the little one to his knee; then, with trembling hands, turned the sacred pages. Was it chance, think you, that caused his attention to be drawn to the third chapter of John? And was it surprising that, in his state of mind at that time, he should quickly recognize in those words the outstretched hand of a yearning Saviour to repentant sinners.

They knelt down, he and the child, her hand clasped firmly in his. She repeated her little prayer, "Now, I lay me," adding, in her own quaint way, "help me to be good, and make uncle good, too." Then another voice, a deeper voice, broke the stillness; and there was joy among the angels in heaven. They tuned their harps anew and sang praises to God, for the lost was found, the wanderer reclaimed. Proud, stern Ernest Mead bowed humbly at the feet of Jesus.

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