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game is lost. All its ancient heroic ventures into the unseen, the true, the absolute, these are over. It resigns itself to accept its own ignorance. Nothing it says can be known as it is. And yet men talk of the progress of intellect; surely the intellect of to-day is in full retreat out of all the country it once claimed to occupy. It is openly professing its defeat. It can find no road, as it once hoped, out of its own limited horizon, out beyond the range of its local and earthly faculties. Man was not made to know, and so it is refusing to accept whatever reaches out beyond the range of its senses, or cannot be proved by its logical processes.

#### THE CHURCH—IS IT A VISIBLE OR INVISIBLE SOCIETY?

COMMUNICATED.

The great question of the age in which we live is just this, what is the Church? The whole question of union centres around this. Our separated brethren tell us pretty well with one voice that the Church of the New Testament, the Church for which Christ prayed, "is not a visible society, is not a mixed body made up of all sorts of men, good and bad." It includes, we are told, none but believers. "There are no hypocrites and no reprobates in this Church." It is a congregation, they say, of the members of Christ, that is, of the saints who do truly believe and rightly obey Christ. This they call the Protestant view of the Church, and tell us that it is derived from a careful examination and induction of the teaching of Scripture direct and indirect bearing upon it. We can only say that there is nothing more astonishing in the history of human opinion than the fact that people think they find in the Bible, or may deduce from it, that which is manifestly not only not contained in it, but which is altogether excluded by many of its plainest statements. And, to our mind, there is no more astounding illustration of this phenomenon than is supplied by the notion that the Bible teaches that the Church of the New Testament, to which the promises are made, and to which the privileges of the Gospel belong, is an invisible, unorganized association of all true believers; all who are predestinated to eternal life, as the Calvinists put it, or of all who are truly converted, as modern sentiment would prefer expressing it.

Whatever else may be affirmed of it, it is beyond dispute that that thing to which the name Church is applied in the New Testament is a visible organized society, with its visible officers and laws, and mode of initiation and badges of membership. We go further, and affirm, without the fear of contradiction, that the name Church is never applied to anything that is not a visible organized society. The word *Ecclesia*, which we translate Church, was not a new term invented by our Lord or His Apostles. It was familiar to the ears of His hearers. It was employed in the Septuagint version of the Scriptures, which was in common use at that time, to describe the Jewish nation, the chosen race (see Ps. xxii., 22). It is used by S. Stephen (Acts vii., 38) to describe that people as a whole. S. Paul applies it to them (Heb. ii., 12.) Now it will not be pretended that God's ancient people, the Jewish nation, were an invisible unorganized community. Nor will it be contended that they were true believers—truly converted men and women—amongst whom no hypocrites and no reprobates were to be found. Here then is a term in familiar use employed by everyone to describe a visible organized society. Surely if its meaning was now to be wholly changed; if it was to be henceforth employed to describe a different kind of society altogether from

that to which it always had been applied—surely, surely, in very mercy, the merciful Lord, to say nothing of His Apostles, would have told his hearers plainly of this change and the reasons for it. But not a hint of any such change, intended or accomplished, is to be found anywhere.

But further, the word Church occurs over a hundred times in the New Testament, and there is no one passage in which it occurs which either by direct statement or fair induction can be made to convey the idea of an invisible Church, made up only of true believers, or of those who have been "predestinated to eternal life." There are many passages which altogether exclude any such meaning. The Church at Pergamos had amongst its members those who held the doctrine of Balaam, and others who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. Were these true believers predestinated to eternal life? The Church at Thyatira had that woman Jezebel, who set herself up to seduce God's servants to commit fornication and eat things offered to idols, for a member. Was she truly converted? Was she not manifestly either a hypocrite or a reprobate? The Church at Sardis had many members whose names were going to be blotted out of the Book of Life (Rev. iii., 5). They were surely not all predestinated to eternal life? The whole of the members of the Church at Laodicea were so lukewarm that they were only fit to be "spued out of the mouth of Christ." Were they truly converted people? The Church at Corinth had in it one member who was guilty of foulest incest; many members who showed that they "were carnal and walked as men by the parties and divisions that had sprung up among them"; many members who were utter sceptics, denying the fundamental doctrine of the Resurrection; many who were guilty of gross profanation of the Lord's Supper. The Church in Galatia had been bewitched, and had all but apostatized. Were all these members of these churches, in spite of the Apostle's condemnation, "true believers, who were truly obeying our Lord Jesus Christ?" Again, if the Church be invisible how could anyone obey the Lord's command, "Tell it unto the Church?" Where could we find an invisible Church, or how could the offending brother hear or refuse to hear the Church if the Church could nowhere be found to hear the complaint or speak to the offender. How, again, could the discipline commanded be exercised? How could you cast a man out of an invisible Church? If he were a good man you could not cast him out of your invisible Church, for all good men are members of it by virtue of their goodness. And if he were a bad man you could not cast him out, for he did not belong to this invisible Church, and never could according to popular teaching. How, again, could a great persecution come upon an invisible Church (Acts viii., 1)? How could the persecutor find it? Or how could the Apostles have assembled with an invisible Church? How could they have ordained elders in every church if the Church was invisible (Acts xii., 27)? Or how could they be brought on their way by an invisible Church? Or how could those at Rome salute an invisible Church? Or how could Saul make havoc of an invisible Church? or Diotrephes cast men out of an invisible Church? or Timothy take care of an invisible Church? Were the Churches to which S. Paul wrote his Epistles at Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Colosse, Philippi, and Thessalonica, invisible Churches? How, again, could the members of an invisible Church "obey them that have the rule over them"? Who would they be? where could they find them?

There is no sin more sternly denounced in Holy Scripture than the sin of schism, the dividing the Body of Christ. But if the Church be invisible, how could parties be formed in it or schisms from it? You might set up as many sects or parties as you liked, and yet you could not, by any act of visible, external separation, divide an invisible community, made up of true spiritual members; and so it would follow not only that many parts of Holy Scripture were written in vain, but are positively chargeable with the fraud of trying to confound a visible society with the one true invisible Church. But no. This modern notion that the Church which Christ said He would build upon this rock, and which S. Paul tells us He did build upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the head corner-stone, is an invisible thing, is a manifest fiction invented to hide from men's eyes the enormous guilt of the sin of schism with which the Christian world is afflicted and humiliated to-day, and which Holy Scripture everywhere so sternly condemns.

It is surely manifest at once that if the Church of the New Testament be an invisible fellowship, then every visible thing on earth calling itself a Church is unscriptural and wrong; is in fact nothing less than a wicked attempt on the part of a mere human and unauthorized society, by appropriating a name which does not belong to it, to delude people into the notion that by joining it they will secure to themselves the promises and privileges which belong to another society altogether. It would hardly be honest for a new firm to take the name of an old and well-established house in order to gain for itself the credit and custom that belonged to the ancient and secure establishment. Or, to take another illustration still fresh in men's minds, it was surely not right, it was most wicked and wrong, for the butcher Arthur Orton to take the name of Roger Tichborne that he might be able to appropriate as his own the rich estates of the Tichborne family. And yet this theory about the Church being invisible obliges us to believe that any visible thing on earth calling itself a church is guilty of just such a crime as that.

But what then, you ask; do you deny that there is an invisible Church? And we answer yes, in the sense described above we do. The company of those who have passed out of the body into the presence of their Lord is invisible to us now, but it is not another Church, it is part of the same. It is also true that those who belong to Christ, not in name and by profession only, but in spirit and in truth, are invisible to us, and known only to God; but neither of these is ever called the invisible Church in the New Testament. That Church is a visible organized body, made up of good and bad members, tares and wheat, wheat and chaff, good fishes and bad, foolish virgins and wise, branches of the true vine, some living, some withering, some dead.

To all the members of this visible Church—this one Body of Christ—as far as God's intention and gift and act can make them so—all the promises of the Gospel, all the privileges of the Church—membership in Christ, adoption and sonship, and inheritance among the saints—are pledged and do belong. Only, as in other matters, a gift has not only to be given but to be taken. A privilege must not only be conferred but accepted. An estate bequeathed must also be claimed and taken possession of before it benefits him to whom it has been given. But many, alas, to whom these high privileges belong, like Esau, despise their birthright, do not claim or seek to