

Appendix

The History and Abuse of the Ground of Oneness

*The geographical practice of the church
– one city equals one church –*

From the history of the church in the New Testament, it is clear that the churches were expressed in a geographical way. They were grouped together not according to doctrines, persons, methods, or ways, but according to cities, or localities. At the close of the New Testament period, after the apostles died, the churches continued to meet together according to geography. Indeed, this principle of the ground of oneness was practiced into the succeeding centuries. The writings of the apostolic and church fathers are filled with references to the practice of the church as one city, one church.

By studying the first three hundred years of church history to the time of the Council of Nicea, we see that the churches continued the practice of having one city as the unit for one local church. Robert Ellis Thompson ob-

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serves this historical fact in his book *The Historic Episcopate*, written in 1910:

It was within the region controlled by the city system, and in Egypt, that the Jewish Dispersion had found a home. It was through this region that the Christian Church was extended by the labors of the Apostles. In cities of Asia, Greece and Italy we see Paul gathering churches; and to six of these city churches he addresses eight of his Epistles; and that to the Galatians was sent to the cities of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. In each city of his field we see a church formed as the church of that city, with the municipal limits accepted as those of the church's responsibility. Barnabas invites him to "return and visit the brethren in every city wherein we proclaimed the word"; and he enjoins upon Titus to "appoint elders in every city" of Crete. Peter, in writing to the "sojourners of the Dispersion," implies that they were residents of cities. To the churches of the seven cities of Asia are addressed the epistles of the Apocalypse.

Nor is there any difference in this respect between apostolic and sub-apostolic literature. Clement writes in the name of the church of Rome to the church of Corinth; Polycarp addresses the church in Philippi; Hermas addresses the church of Rome, and asks that his book be sent "to the cities abroad." Every city that has been reached by the gospel has its church; and every church has its city. Nowhere, except in the case of the Apostles, and the evangelists specially commissioned to act for them, have we knowledge of any church official who claims to exercise authority over any larger area than a city. . . .

. . . Whether large or small, the city was the unit of Church organization throughout the lands around the Medi-

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terreanean, over which Rome had established her rule as a city mistress of the cities. Many or few, the Christians of each city made up one congregation, met at one communion table, broke the one loaf, and brought to the one place that weekly offertory, from which were relieved the poor, the stranger, the imprisoned for the gospel's sake and the widows and orphans. And they submitted to the rule of one presbytery, and filled vacancies in its membership by free election from their own number.

Even the largest of the cities was at first no exception. Rome is estimated to have held a population of four millions within its walls. The church of Rome was the largest and the most wealthy of all. In the time of Bishop Callistus (A.D. 218-223) we read of its forty-six presbyters, seven deacons and as many sub-deacons, forty-two acolytes or attendants, fifty-two exorcists, readers and door-keepers, and fifteen hundred widows and others on the list of persons aided from the funds of the church. Yet not until the middle of the third century do we hear of any subdivision of the church. . . .*

* Robert Ellis Thompson, *The Historic Episcopate*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1910, pp. 169-72.

In his *History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church by the Apostles*, Augustus Neander also observes that the practice of the churches in the New Testament was according to one church in each city. In this classic work, written in 1876, Neander says:

. . . The Epistles of the apostle Paul give the clearest

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evidence that all the Christians of one city originally formed one whole church. Yet we may easily suppose that some parts of the church, without separating themselves from the whole body and its guidance, held particular meetings in the house of some person whose locality was very suitable, and who acted as the διδάσκαλος [teacher] for the edification of such small assemblies. Thus it may be explained how Aquila and Priscilla, while they sojourned at Rome, or Corinth, or Ephesus, might have such a small Christian society in their own house. Yet it does not seem right to consider these as absolutely separate and distinct churches; for we could not suppose that such a company of believers would be waiting for the arrival of a person like Aquila, who so often changed his residence; they must have had a fixed place of assembling, and their appointed overseers, (a presbyter or bishop, according to that supposition.) In 1 Cor. xvi. 20, the church, forming one whole (all the brethren), is expressly distinguished from any such partial assembly. In Rom. xvi. 23, a brother is mentioned, in whose house the whole church held their meetings. In Coloss. iv. 15, after a salutation to the whole church, an individual is specified and included in the salutation, at whose house such private meetings were held. But it may be questioned whether in such places as Rom. xvi. 14, 15 (“Salute Asyncritus — *and the brethren that are with them.*” “Salute Philologus — *and all the saints that are with them,*”) meetings of this kind are intended, or only those persons who, on account of their family ties or connexions in business, lived in intimacy with one another.*

* Augustus Neander, *History of the Planting and Training of the Christian Church by the Apostles*, vol. 1, London: George Bell and Sons, 1876, p. 151.

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Charles Briggs (co-editor of Brown, Driver, & Briggs' Hebrew Lexicon) also notes the practice of one church in each city in his book *Church Unity*, written in 1909:

The theory of Church government which is held more or less tenaciously by all organised Churches is, that there can be but one lawful Church of Jesus Christ in one territory. Where two or more claim to exist, their claims are unlawful. They are schismatic and rebellious against the one Church of Christ. In the New Testament we find nowhere more than one church in a city. The New Testament does not contemplate a Church divided into a number of independent organisations in the same territory.*

* Charles Augustus Briggs, *Church Unity*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909, pp. 176-77.

From the foregoing quotes, it is evident that there was not a denominational concept among the Christians in the early centuries of church history. Their concept was strictly geographical. Churches were "local churches," that is, churches meeting according to cities, not according to persons, doctrines, experiences, or other factors. The relationship between all these local churches was "catholic," or "universal." Thus, the ancient "catholic church" (not Roman) of the post-apostolic period was simply the universal church, made up of all the churches that met according to one church in each city. The sum total of all the local churches was "the catholic church."

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The first use of the term “catholic” occurs in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch. In chapter 8 of his letter to the Smyrneans, he says, “Wherever Jesus Christ is there is the catholic church.” J. C. V. Durell, in his *Historic Church*, comments on the significance of “catholic” as it was used by Ignatius:

ἡ καθολικὴ ἐκκλησία. The epithet here has not the later technical sense, which appears first in the Muratorian Fragment, meaning the true church as opposed to heretical sects. Here it simply expresses the one universal church. It is the entire church, as opposed to the local churches, the communities in particular places. The word καθολικός was in common use at the time, signifying “universal” as opposed to “individual.” It is applied as an epithet to ἐκκλησία in Mart. Polyc. three times (*circ.* A.D. 155) in the same sense as here. It was only at a later date that, as the Muratorian Fragment shows, a technical sense began to be attached to the phrase “the Catholic church,” as descriptive of its character and doctrine.*

* J. C. V. Durell, *The Historic Church*, Cambridge: The University Press, 1906, p. 27.

The emergence of the monarchical bishop – one city, one church, one bishop –

Although Ignatius did not use the term “catholic” as it was later used in the more “technical” sense, he did

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associate it with a wrong and exaggerated use of the term “bishop.” It is at that point in history that we begin to see an abuse of the geographical ground of the church. That is, within the practice of one church in one city there arose a hierarchical form of church government. Instead of one church, one city, one eldership, as was practiced in the New Testament (cf. Acts 14:23 and Titus 1:5), the practice became one city, one church, one bishop.

This incipient abuse of the ground of oneness was first manifested in the writings of Ignatius in the early part of the second century. Many writers through the centuries have noted the change that began to take place at that time regarding the administration of the local churches. Church government through a plurality of elders began to be replaced by a single person who emerged over the elders and was designated as the bishop. Originally, in the New Testament, “elder” and “bishop” referred to only one person (Acts 20:17, 28). It was simply one person considered from two aspects: as to his person, he was an elder; as to his function, he was an overseer, or bishop (derived from the old English word *biscop*, meaning “overseer”).

It is to be noted that even though the geographical practice of one church in one city was retained, an abuse of this ground of oneness emerged in the form of the office of the bishop. This emergence of a hierarchy

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among the churches is well documented in the writings of church history.

Clement of Rome (A.D. 30—100) was one of the earliest leaders in the church in Rome. He is believed to be the Clement mentioned as one of Paul's co-workers in Philippians 4:3. His letter to the Corinthian believers is one of the earliest Christian documents that helps us understand the complexion of the churches immediately following the time of the apostles. Clement begins his letter with "The Church of God which sojourns at Rome to the Church of God sojourning at Corinth" (1 Clement 1:1). Thus, his letter is identified as being written not by himself alone, but by the entire congregation of Rome. It was written from the saints in Rome with the purpose of dealing with the divisive situation existing in the church in Corinth.

There are no clear indications that a bishop or hierarchy had definitely emerged by this time in the church in Rome. First Clement 42 mentions "bishops and deacons," but only in the New Testament sense of the plurality of elders. Also, in chapter 47 Clement mentions a plurality of "elders" (presbyters) as the structure of leadership in the church in Corinth. Dr. Alexander Allen, in his *Christian Institutions*, makes the following observation concerning the organization of the church as it existed at that time:

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. . . But incidentally we learn something regarding the organization of the church in both these places [Rome and Corinth] at the close of the first century. There were in Rome the leaders or rulers of the church (ἡγούμενοι), who may have been the prophets; there were a class known as the presbyters, from whom the ranks of the bishops and deacons were recruited; there was still a plural episcopate at Rome and at Corinth, and the single bishop had not yet appeared. It may have been that the sedition of the church at Corinth was an effort to place the single bishop above the presbyters, and to this end deprive the presbyters, who had hitherto officiated as bishops, of their office. Clement himself must have belonged to the leaders or rulers, and have been the foremost man in the Roman church, as his epistle would indicate that he deserved to be, and as tradition has represented him. After the middle of the second century, when the monarchical episcopate had been established, he was called the Bishop of Rome, which corresponded rightly enough with the later organization, but is an anachronism if we speak from the point of view of his own age.*

* Alexander V. G. Allen, *Christian Institutions*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897, pp. 53-54.

Following Clement of Rome, within a short period of time we find a totally different atmosphere with Ignatius of Antioch (A.D. 30-107). Leaving a plurality of leadership, we now encounter the concept of the bishop being the unique leader over each church, or city. The seven epistles of Ignatius to various churches reveal the ex-

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tremes to which the concept of the bishop had been taken. The following are the statements about the bishop in the letters of Ignatius, as summarized by Dr. Allen in *Christian Institutions*:

“Wherefore it is fitting that ye should run together in accordance with the will of your bishop, which thing also ye do. For your justly renowned presbytery, worthy of God, is fitted as exactly to the bishop as the strings are to the harp” (Ad Eph. c. iv.). “Let us be careful, then, not to set ourselves in opposition to the bishop in order that we may be subject to God” (c. v.). “It is manifest, therefore, that we should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord Himself” (c. vi.). “Now it becomes you also not to treat your bishop too familiarly on account of his youth, but to yield him all reverence, having respect to the power of God the Father, as I have known even holy presbyters do, not judging rashly from the manifest youthful appearance (of their bishop), but as being themselves prudent in God, submitting to him, or rather not to him, but to the Father of Jesus Christ, the bishop of us all. . . . Obey your bishop in honor of Him who has willed us to do so” (Ad Mag. cc. iii., xiii.). “Some indeed give one the title of bishop, but do all things without him” (c. iv.). “Since ye are subject to the bishop as Jesus Christ, ye appear to me to live not after the manner of men, but according to Jesus Christ who died for us” (Ad Trall., c. ii.). “It becometh every one of you, and especially the presbyters, to refresh the bishop to the honor of the Father” (c. xii.). “As many as are of God and of Jesus Christ are also with the bishop” (Ad Phil. c. iii.). “The Spirit proclaimed these words, Do nothing without the bishop” (c.

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vii.). “To all them that repent, the Lord grants forgiveness if they turn in penitence to the unity of God and to communion with the bishop” (c. viii.). “Let no man do anything connected with the church without the bishop. Let that be deemed a proper Eucharist which is administered either by the bishop or by one to whom he has entrusted it. Wherever the bishop shall appear, there let the multitude also be, even as wherever Jesus Christ is there is the Catholic church. It is not lawful without the bishop either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast; but whatsoever he shall approve of, that is also pleasing to God, so that everything that is done may be secure and valid” (Ad Smyr. c. viii.). “It is well to reverence both God and the bishop. He who honors the bishop has been honored by God; he who does anything without the knowledge of the bishop, serves the devil” (c. ix.). Writing to Polycarp, the Bishop of Smyrna, Ignatius enjoins him also in the familiar words, “Let nothing be done without thy consent” (c. vi.). “If any one reckons himself greater than the bishop, he is ruined. But it becomes both men and women who marry to form their union with the approval of the bishop, that their marriage may be according to God” (c. v.).*

* Alexander V. G. Allen, *Christian Institutions*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1897, pp. 63-64.

In the years following Ignatius of Antioch, up to the time of the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, the concept of the church was clearly geographical and hierarchical. One city, one church, one bishop was the only practice that was accepted. Indeed, the 8th Canon of the Council

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of Nicea made it clear that there could not be two bishops in one city. The following is the full text of the canon:

“With regard to those who call themselves *Cathari*, the holy and great Synod decides, that if they will enter the Catholic and Apostolic Church, they must submit to imposition of hands, and they may then remain among the clergy: they must, above all, promise in writing to conform to and follow the doctrines of the Catholic and Apostolic Church; that is to say, they must communicate with those who have married a second time, and with those who have lapsed under persecution, but who have done penance for their faults. They must then follow in every respect the doctrines of the Catholic Church. Consequently, when in villages or in cities there are found only clergy of their own sect, the oldest of these clerics shall remain among the clergy, and in their position; but if a Catholic priest or bishop be found among them, it is evident that the bishop of the Catholic Church should preserve the episcopal dignity, whilst any one who has received the title of bishop from the so-called *Cathari* would only have a right to the honours accorded to priests, unless the bishop thinks it right to let him enjoy the honour of the (episcopal) title. If he does not desire to do so, let him give him the place of rural bishop (*chorepiscopus*) or priest, in order that he may appear to be altogether a part of the clergy, and that there may not be two bishops in one city.”*

* Charles Joseph Hefele, *A History of the Christian Councils: From the Original Documents to the Close of the Council of Nicea, A.D. 325*, translated and edited by William R. Clark, 2nd ed., rev., Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1894, p. 410.

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From a historical perspective, two things transpired simultaneously: the practice of the ground of the church was tenaciously adhered to, with one church in each city; and the concept and practice of the bishop over each local church was equally enforced. It is obvious that the office of the bishop had begun to usurp the place of Christ. The centrality of Christ was being replaced by the centrality of the bishop.

The position of the bishop grew stronger and stronger as the years progressed. It is to be observed that this supremacy of the bishop was occurring in the context of a proper standing on the ground of the church as it was practiced in the New Testament. Thus, an unscriptural practice (the supremacy of the bishop) was mixed together with a scriptural practice (the ground of the church). Edwin Hatch makes this point in his classic Bampton Lectures delivered in 1880:

... Whoever in any city claimed to be a member of the Christian Church must belong to the established organization of that city. The seamless coat of Christ must not be rent. As there was one God, and one Christ, and one Holy Spirit, so there could be but one bishop. The attempt to form two communities side by side put its authors outside the pale of the Church Catholic: σχίσμα, like αἵρεσις, was a word of bad repute: the keystone of Christian organization was fitted firmly into its place: the free right of association existed no longer.

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One other result flowed from this conception of the bishop as the embodiment of unity of doctrine and unity of discipline, which also helps to confirm the view that the prevalence of that conception was the main cause of his supremacy.

The earliest theory of the relation of the bishop to the community was, as we have already seen, that the bishop stood in the place of the unseen Lord, entrusted with the oversight of his Master's household until He should return from that far country into which He had gone. This view is found in the Ignatian Epistles, in the Clementines, and in the Apostolical Constitutions. In none of these cases is there any ambiguity of expression. The bishop is in the place of God, or of Christ: the presbyters are in the place of the Apostles. But gradually another theory interweaves itself with this and ultimately takes its place. It was a not unnatural inference from the belief that the bishop was the custodian and conservator of Apostolic teaching that he, rather than the presbyters, took the Apostles' place.*

* Edwin Hatch, *The Organization of the Early Christian Churches*, The Bampton Lectures delivered at the University of Oxford (1880), London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1895, pp. 105-6.

The authority of the bishop developed within the context of geographical jurisdiction. This is obvious from the writings of church history, which are replete with questions about the bishop's geographical boundaries and limits. Even today's ecclesiastical system of the Roman Catholic Church is entirely based on geographi-

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cal considerations. Joseph Bingham presents some of these considerations in his work *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*:

SECT. IX. — *An Account of the Ecclesiæ Suburbicariæ in the District of the Roman Church.*

Whilst we are upon this head, relating to the ancient division of the Church, it comes properly to be inquired, what the primitive writers mean by the term *ecclesiæ suburbicariæ*, ‘suburbicary churches,’ in the district of the Roman church. Ruffinus, in his translation and abstract of the Nicene Canons, gives us the sixth of them in these words, “The ancient custom of Alexandria and Rome shall still be observed, that the one shall have the care or government of the Egyptian; and the other, that of the suburbicary churches.” A great many questions have been raised by learned men in the last age concerning this, which I shall not clog this discourse with, but only resolve two questions, which are most material for a reader to know.

1. What was the extent of this district?

2. Whether it was the limits of his metropolitanical or patriarchal power?

To know what was the extent of this district . . . many others, take it to signify the district of the *præfectus urbis*, or ‘jurisdiction of the provost of Rome,’ which was a circuit of about a hundred miles next to Rome; as is evident from the ancient law, which says, his government extended not only to Rome, but to a hundred miles round it, where the limits of his jurisdiction ceased. . . . so that the Roman *vicarius* had seven provinces in Italy . . . and the three

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islands of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, under his jurisdiction; which they reckon the suburbicary provinces of Rome. So our learned Mr. Brerewood, and Sirmond, and Du Pin, and some others, who extend the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the bishop of Rome to all those ten provinces, under the inspection of the *vicarius urbis*. . . .whereas, they who confine the suburbicary churches to a single diocess, or extend them so far as to include all the provinces of the Western empire, run into contrary extremes, for which there is no ground, either in the Nicene Canon itself, or any other part of the history of the Church in that age. For it is evident the Canon speaks of the power of the three great bishops, Rome, Alexandria, and Antioch, as extending further than a single diocess: but that the authority of the bishop of Rome in those days extended over the whole Western empire. . . .*

* Joseph Bingham, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, London: Gilbert & Rivington Printers, 1829, pp. 18-21.

In the early centuries the church was clearly a geographical matter, as it was in the New Testament. It was not thought of as a denominational matter. Indeed, there was no such practice as coexisting with another denomination. Any practice of the church outside the geographical jurisdiction of the catholic church, which was now rapidly becoming the Roman Catholic Church, was considered to be heretical. Either you were under the jurisdiction of a city-church with an approved bishop, or you

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were considered as being outside the church. Under the developing Catholic system, a believer's oneness with the church consisted of being one with the church in his city, including the one bishop.

By examining the writings of the early fathers, as well as church documents and creeds, and the canons of the councils, we observe that the church was geographical in its practice from the time of the apostles to the time of the Reformation. When this principle of geography is the factor of practicing the church, by its very nature it does not leave room for options, or choices. And herein lies its abuse. In the developing Catholic system, this principle of one church in one city left no alternative for a person. In whatever city he lived, he had to be a part of the Catholic Church with its ruling bishop. Thus, the existence of a hierarchical system within the framework of the ground of the church was the chief factor that led to the abuse of the ground of oneness.

As the Roman Catholic Church was evolving, the writers of the ecclesiastical documents were careful to demarcate the geographical jurisdictions of the churches and their bishops. Again, Joseph Bingham comments on this growing abuse of the geographical practice of the church that occurred in the early years of the Roman Catholic Church:

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SECT. II. — *The State of the Church conformable to it.*

Now, much after the same manner, the apostles in first planting and establishing the Church, wherever they found a civil magistracy settled in any place, there they endeavoured to settle an ecclesiastical one, consisting of a senate or presbytery, a common-council of presbyters, and one chief president above the rest, commonly called the *προεστώς*, or 'the apostle,' or 'bishop,' or 'angel of the church;' whose jurisdiction was not confined to a single congregation, but extended to the whole region or district belonging to the city, which was the *προάστεια*, or *παροικία*, or, as we now call it, 'the diocese of the church.' According to this model, most probably, St. Paul directed Titus to ordain elders in Crete *κατὰ πόλιν*, 'in every city;' that is, to settle an ecclesiastical senate and government in every place where there was before a civil one; which, from the subsequent history of the Church, we learn, was a bishop and his presbytery, who were conjunctly called the elders and senate of the church. The cities of the empire had also their magistrates in the territory or country round them; but these were subordinate to the magistrates of the city, and generally chosen by them, as learned men have observed out of Frontinus *de Limitibus Agrariis*, and other Roman antiquaries. In like manner, every city church had spiritual officers in all towns and villages belonging to the city region: and these depending on the mother-church both for the exercise of their power and their institution, they being both subordinate and accountable to the city church, as the subordinate magistrates were in the civil disposition.

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SECT. III. — *The Division of the Roman Empire into Provinces and Diocesses.*

Another division of the Roman empire was into provinces and diocesses. A province was the cities of a whole region subjected to the authority of one chief magistrate, who resided in the metropolis, or chief city of the province. This was commonly a prætor, or a proconsul, or some magistrate of the like eminence and dignity. A diocess was still a larger district, containing several provinces within the compass of it, in the capital city of which district a more general magistrate had his residence; whose power extended over the whole diocess, to receive appeals, and determine all causes that were referred to him for a new hearing from any city within the district: and this magistrate was sometimes called an *eparchus*, or *vicarius*, of the Roman empire, and particularly a *præfectus augustalis* at Alexandria. When first this division was made, it is not so certainly agreed among learned men; but it is generally owned, that the division of provinces is more ancient than that of diocesses. For the division into diocesses began only about the time of Constantine, but the cantonising of the empire into provinces was long before; by some referred to Vespasian, by others reckoned still more ancient, and coeval to the first establishment of the Christian Church.

SECT. IV. — *The same Model followed by the Church.*

However this was, it is very plain that the Church took her model, in setting up metropolitical and patriarchal power, from this plan of the state; for, as in every metropolis, or chief city of each province, there was a superior magistrate above the magistrates of every single city, so,

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likewise, in the same metropolis, there was a bishop, whose power extended over the whole province, whence he was called the metropolitan, or primate, as being the principal bishop of the province: and in all places, therefore, the see of this bishop was fixed to the civil metropolis, except in Afric, where the primate was commonly the senior bishop of the province, as has been shewn in another place. In like manner, as the state had a *vicarius* in every capital city of each civil diocess; so the Church, in process of time, came to have her exarchs, or patriarchs, in many, if not in all the capital cities of the empire.*

* Joseph Bingham, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*, vol. 3, London: Gilbert & Rivington Printers, 1829, pp. 2-4.

The hierarchical organization of the Roman Catholic Church was built upon geography as the ground of the church. This is evidenced in the problems that arose over the jurisdiction of a bishop within his diocese, or district, due to the size of the city. For example, the country bishops, known as *chorepiscopi* in Greek, lost their jurisdictions to the larger city bishops. Again, this reveals that the practice of the church at that time was under a geographical concept. C. H. Turner, in his *Studies in Early Church History*, describes the kinds of problems that faced the church at that time:

That there cannot now be two bishops of the same see or jurisdiction is obvious. There cannot be more than one

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bishop, say, of Winchester, and no discontented faction could set up a second bishop with valid claims to recognition by the federation until the one already in possession was ousted. It is, in fact, the episcopal organization of the Church as a Society, not the voluntary act of each individual Churchman, which guarantees a bishop's authority. In practice we may even go further and say that, although there could be, there are never likely to be two bishops in the same city, even with different jurisdictions. . . .

Words need not be wasted to prove what no one would dream of denying, that in the fourth century the rule, one bishop only in each city, was absolute. We are not so sure that we should carry Dr. Hatch with us at once to concede the territorial or diocesan character of the whole episcopate in that period. But whatever may have been the earlier conception of a bishopric, the canons of the council of Antioch (A.D. 341) prove to demonstration that the sphere of a bishop's action was not confined to his 'city' (πόλις), but embraced the 'country' or 'countries' (χώραι) surrounding and depending upon it. 'Every bishop has authority over his own diocese, and must . . . take charge of the whole region surrounding his episcopal city' (can. 9). Chorepiscopi, or country bishops, may not ordain a priest or deacon 'without the bishop of the city to which the chorepiscopus himself and the whole district are subject' (can. 10).*

* Cuthbert Hamilton Turner, *Studies in Early Church History*, Collected Papers, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912, pp. 38-39, 41.

One of the major factors contributing to the increasing importance of the office of the bishop was the struggle

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against heresy. Many of the smaller churches were weak, and heresies were able to penetrate the church in their localities. The larger churches in the larger cities were able to stand against the heresies with the truth. Thus, more prestige and primacy was given to the larger churches and their bishops. This was especially true of the city of Rome. The church in Rome was able to preserve the cardinal truths of the faith against heresy. (For example, they preserved the truths of the Trinity and the Person of Christ with His two natures.) One of the most significant statements in church history about the primacy of the church in Rome comes from Irenaeus in his book *Against Heresies*:

Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vain-glory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings; [we do this, I say,] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its preeminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolical tradition has been

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preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere.*

* Irenæus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973, pp. 415-16.

Although many of the church fathers, as well as church tradition, speak of the apostle Peter as being the first bishop of Rome, there is no proper, reliable evidence in the New Testament or in the relevant documents of the early church to indicate that this was true. C. De Lisle Shortt, an English scholar, wrote a book entitled *Who Was the First Bishop of Rome?* In it he thoroughly investigated the claims of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the primacy of Peter and his position as the first bishop of Rome. The following is an excerpt from his conclusion:

Important questions

(a) The question now arises — how are these facts compatible with the belief that St. Peter, the Apostle of the Circumcision, to whom the conversion of the Jews had been specially entrusted, had been the founder of the Church of Rome, and had also been resident there for a considerable time?

(b) If St. Peter had been at Rome when St. Paul wrote to the Romans, St. Paul would surely have addressed a salutation to him — a very special salutation, if he was the

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bishop of Rome.

(c) If St. Peter had been in Rome when St. Paul was there, it is most reasonable to believe that there would have been some mention of it in the Acts of the Apostles or the Epistles.

(d) If St. Peter had been in Rome before St. Paul, and had been a bishop of the city, it is altogether incredible that St. Paul should have usurped such authority over St. Peter's flock, as he assumed over these Romans.

(e) Still more remarkable is the fact that the Jews were discovered by St. Paul to be completely uninstructed in the Christian faith. The only reasonable answer which can be returned to these questions is that St. Peter had not arrived in Rome before St. Paul.*

* C. De Lisle Shortt, *Who Was the First Bishop of Rome?* Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1935, pp. 217-18.

Most church historians give their main attention to the evolution of the authority of bishops into a hierarchy. Their focus is on the primacy of Rome and identifying Peter as the first bishop there. What is overlooked is that this hierarchical structure was superimposed upon a scriptural practice of one city, one church. In other words, the Roman Catholic Church with its practice of hierarchy was *not* emerging as a denomination among a number of other denominations. Denominations as we know them today did not come into existence until after the Reformation. The claims of the Roman Church were

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not denominational claims but geographical claims over the cities of the earth. This meant that to a practicing Catholic, the Roman Catholic Church was the only authorized and approved church in any city. Again, these claims were based on the geographical practice of the church in the New Testament as well as early church history. Thus, what we have with the Roman Catholic Church is a prime example of the truth of the ground of the church being abused.

The abuse of the ground of the church by hierarchy

“Catholic” means universal. Every student of church history knows that in the first few centuries after the time of the apostles, the church was not called “the *Roman* Catholic Church.” It was simply called “the catholic church.” In those days this identification referred to the universal church made up of all true believers. It was the catholic, or universal, church that met in Antioch, Alexandria, Rome, and other cities. The churches were properly “local” churches, not denominational churches or heretical churches. Whatever city you were in, you simply met with the church in that city. You were part of the catholic church. There was only one way to consider the church, and that was geographically. Thus, both in the

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understanding and practice of the church in the early centuries, the church was exclusively “catholic,” and it expressed itself in local churches. This is history.

With this background we can better appreciate the severity of the abuse that took place on the proper ground of the church. To practice the church geographically is right, but for that practice to be abused by hierarchy is wrong. Even today the Roman Catholic Church continues to be under the principle of geography. In the early years of the hierarchical development, more and more authority was given to Rome. The catholic church did not become the Roman Catholic Church immediately. It was gradual. It happened through the battles with heresy. It happened due to the preeminence that Rome held in the Roman Empire. It happened due to the misinformation, passed on by tradition, about Peter being the first bishop of Rome. It happened unwittingly as more attention was given to the bishop of Rome. His authority superseded that of all the other bishops. Eventually, the bishop of Rome became the Pope. Thus, all the churches meeting geographically became identified not simply as the catholic church meeting in cities, but the *Roman* Catholic Church meeting in cities. This truly was, and is, an abuse of the ground of the church as it is revealed in the pages of the New Testament.

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Even Irenaeus, considered to be an important teacher of the church, said, “It is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church [Rome], on account of its preeminent authority.” With a renowned teacher of the church giving this kind of position to Rome, it is no wonder that Rome became the pinnacle of the hierarchy. This hierarchy of a pope, bishops, cardinals, priests, and many other leavening things corrupted the simplicity and purity of Christ as it is found in the New Testament.

It was against this abuse by the Roman Catholic Church that Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the reformers of the sixteenth century reacted so strongly. They had to somehow extricate themselves from the authority of Rome and the geographical hold that came with being a part of the universal Roman Church. What the reformers did was exactly what Paul did in Galatians chapter 2. When Peter, the leading one from the mother church in Jerusalem, deviated from practicing the truth of the gospel, Paul not only opposed him to his face but he also called his attention to the major factor that binds all believers together — justification by faith (vv. 11-16). In the same way, Luther and Calvin had to expose the unscriptural doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, while at the same time dealing with its

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intimidating claim of being *the* one and only true Church. How did they overcome this intimidation? How did they justify their actions which were outside of Roman approval? In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin describes the extent to which the Roman Catholic hierarchy had corrupted the church, leaving only traces of its true character and form:

However, when we categorically deny to the papists the title of *the* church, we do not for this reason impugn the existence of churches among them. Rather, we are only contending about the true and lawful constitution of the church, required in the communion not only of the sacraments (which are the signs of profession) but also especially of doctrine. Daniel [Dan. 9:27] and Paul [II Thess. 2:4] foretold that Antichrist would sit in the Temple of God. With us, it is the Roman pontiff we make the leader and standard bearer of that wicked and abominable kingdom. The fact that his seat is placed in the Temple of God signifies that his reign was not to be such as to wipe out either the name of Christ or of the church. From this it therefore is evident that we by no means deny that the churches under his tyranny remain churches. But these he has profaned by his sacrilegious impiety, afflicted by his inhuman domination, corrupted and well-nigh killed by his evil and deadly doctrines, which are like poisoned drinks. In them Christ lies hidden, half buried, the gospel overthrown, piety scattered, the worship of God nearly wiped out. In them, briefly, everything is so confused that there we see the face of Babylon rather than that of the Holy City

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of God. To sum up, I call them churches to the extent that the Lord wonderfully preserves in them a remnant of his people, however woefully dispersed and scattered, and to the extent that some marks of the church remain — especially those marks whose effectiveness neither the devil's wiles nor human depravity can destroy. But on the other hand, because in them those marks have been erased to which we should pay particular regard in this discourse, I say that every one of their congregations and their whole body lack the lawful form of the church.*

* John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960, pp. 1052-53.

Calvin's forceful words speak for themselves. While laying bare the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, they also point out the major factors of the gospel and show us what is essential for the reality of the church to exist.

Martin Luther also uses the Word of God to strongly deal with the problem of the Roman Catholic Church in its holding sway over the consciences of men in the sixteenth century. In his classic work *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, Luther addresses the issues in a direct way:

I myself can hardly believe I was as verbose when I lectured on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, as this volume indicates. But since I recognise as mine all the

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thoughts which the brethren have taken such pains to set down in it, I am forced to admit that I said as much and perhaps even more. For the one doctrine which I have supremely at heart, is that of faith in Christ, from whom, through whom and unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth day and night. Not that I find I have grasped anything of a wisdom so high, so broad and so profound, beyond a few meagre rudiments and fragments; and I am ashamed that my poor, uninspired comments on so great an Apostle and chosen instrument of God should be published. Yet I am compelled to forget my shame and be quite shameless in view of the horrible profanation and abomination which have always raged in the Church of God, and still rage to-day, against this one solid rock which we call the doctrine of justification. I mean the doctrine that we are redeemed from sin, death and the devil, and made partakers of eternal life, not by ourselves (and certainly not by our works, which are less than ourselves), but by the help of another, the only-begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ. . . .

Even so the Pope at this day, when he hath no authority of the Scripture to defend himself withal, useth this one argument continually against us, 'The Church, the Church.' 'Thinkest thou that God is so offended, that for a few heretics of Luther's sect he will cast off his whole Church? Thinkest thou that he would leave his Church in error so many hundred years?' And this he mightily maintaineth, that the Church can never be overthrown. Now, like as many are moved with this argument at this day, so in Paul's time these false apostles, through great bragging and setting forth of their own praises, blinded the eyes of the Galatians, so that Paul lost his authority among them, and his doctrine was brought in suspicion.

Against this vain bragging and boasting of the false

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apostles, Paul with great constancy and boldness setteth his apostolic authority, highly commending his vocation, and defending his ministry. And (although elsewhere he never doth the like) he will not give place to any, no, not to the Apostles themselves, much less to any of their scholars. And to abate their pharisaical pride and shameless boldness, he maketh mention of the history done in Antioch, where he withstood Peter himself. Besides this, not regarding the offence that might arise thereof, he saith plainly in the text, that he was bold to accuse and reprove Peter himself, the chief of the Apostles, who had seen Christ, and had been most familiarly conversant with him. I am an Apostle (saith he) and such a one as pass not what others are: yea, I was not afraid to chide the very pillar of all the rest of the Apostles. And to conclude, in the first two chapters, he doth, in a manner, nothing else but set out his vocation, his office and his Gospel, affirming that it was not of men, and that he had not received it by man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ: also, that if he, or an angel from heaven, should bring any other gospel than that which he had preached, he should be holden accursed.*

* Martin Luther, *A Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, Cambridge & London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1972, pp. 16, 31.

To learn the lesson of history, we need to see that any practice of the church in a geographical way as one city, one church will always be vulnerable to Satan's subtle abuse and perversion. He abuses the truth of the ground of the church by bringing in a hierarchical system to

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replace Christ. Thus, the proper ground of the church has been leavened by hierarchy. This is what has taken place with the Roman Catholic Church. What was intended to be a simple and common ground for all believers to practically experience their oneness became an institution, with a Pope at the head and a network of hierarchy and traditions that frustrate believers from the simplicity of Christ. Instead of Christ and His redemptive work remaining as the factor between believers, the factor became the leadership of a man, along with the intimidation of a lengthy Roman Church tradition and claims of being “the true church.”

Church history is peppered with much pain and suffering due to the persecutions instigated by the Roman Catholic Church. Under the cloak of being “the universal church” and “the only true church,” Rome justified her actions of martyring thousands of genuine believers whom she labeled as heretics. The Inquisitions are a blight on church history. Many thousands of believers were killed in a wholesale manner. The well known *Foxe’s Christian Martyrs of the World* tells how these believers suffered at the hands of the so-called one true Church. One example of martyrdom among true believers will suffice from Foxe’s book to bring out this point:

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Waldenses Smothered in a Cave

The pope determined at last to take such measures as would crush the Waldenses, and put an end forever to the hated sect which defied the authority of the Roman church. Accordingly he sent Albert de Capitaneis, archdeacon of Cremona, to France; who interested the king's lieutenant, and succeeded in raising a large body of troops for the purpose of driving the Waldenses out of their valleys. But when the soldiers arrived they found the houses empty and the place deserted, for the people had heard of their coming and had fled to the mountains, hiding themselves among the rocks and caves.

The archdeacon and lieutenant followed them, however, with the troops, and taking many prisoners, they dashed them headlong from the precipices. A good many escaped for a time from the hands of the soldiers, and hid in the darkest recesses of rocky caves, for as they knew the secret passage-ways they were able to conceal themselves. The archdeacon and lieutenant being, therefore, unable to seize them, they ordered firewood heaped up at the mouths of the caves. When all was ready the piles were lighted, and the people inside were all smothered to death by the smoke and heat. Upon searching the caves after the fires had gone out, more than 1000 dead bodies were found, many being those of women and children. Altogether 3000 persons were slain during this attack.

After this cruel work, the lieutenant and archdeacon went with the troops to other places in order to attack the Waldenses. But these having heard of the fate of their brethren in the valley, armed themselves; and by fortifying the different passes, and bravely disputing the advance of the soldiers, they inflicted such injuries upon them that the

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lieutenant was compelled to go back without accomplishing anything.*

* John Foxe, *Foxe's Christian Martyrs of the World*, Chicago: Moody Press, n.d., pp. 182-84.

We must ask, how could a “church” act in this way? How could such atrocities take place in the name of God? The answer lies in the fact that the people were fortified by the thought of being “the true church.” What gave impetus to their deeds was their fanatical belief in the supreme position of the Roman Church to deal with all “heretics.” The church historian Philip Schaff summarizes the concept of the Roman Church at the time of the Inquisitions:

The Inquisition was called the Holy Office — *sanctum officium* — from the praiseworthy work it was regarded as being engaged in. Its chief officials, the Inquisitors, were exempted by Alexander IV., 1259, and Urban IV., 1262, from all ecclesiastical jurisdiction, whether bishops, archbishops, or papal legates, except the jurisdiction of the Apostolic see, and from all interference by the secular power. They also enjoyed the right to excommunicate, lay the interdict, and to absolve their agents for acts of violence.*

* Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 5, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974, p. 525.

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Such a survey of the history and abuse of the ground of oneness in relation to the Roman Catholic Church should cause us to reconsider the practice of the ground of the church. We need to understand that the Roman Catholic Church represents a geographically-based practice of the church that has gone amiss due to the major factors of oneness between believers being adulterated by a system of hierarchy. Other examples of the abuse of the ground of the church could be mentioned, such as the commonly named Plymouth Brethren movement in England and Ireland in the nineteenth century. In their initial practice of the church they sought to recover the geographical principle found in the New Testament. One of the Brethren's historians, Napoleon Noel, has summarized their understanding of the proper practice of the church:

The Falseness of Modern Independency and Isolation

The above, systematizes, and defines and formulates in detail, modern isolating independency, which is in contradiction of and opposition to the truth of the Church of God on earth, and other precious truths recovered to God's people since 1827. In this way "some remove the landmarks." But scripture teaches three aspects of the Church of God, namely, (1st) *Local*, including all Christians *in a city* or locality, as "the church at Jerusalem," or "at Antioch," or "at Corinth," "in one place" (Acts viii. 1; xiii. 1; 1 Cor. i. 2; xiv. 23); (2nd) *Universal*, including all the Christians

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on earth at any particular point of time, as “*One Flock*,” or “*All the Flock . . . the Church of God*,” or “*all baptized into One Body*” (John x. 16; Act ii. 47; xx. 28; 1 Cor. x. 17, 32; xii. 27, 28. See also Matt. xvi. 18; John xi. 51, 52; xvii. 11, 21-23; Eph. i. 22, 23; v. 23, 29; Col. i. 18, 24), and (3rd) as *Complete*, at the close of the dispensation, “*a glorious Church*,” “*the Bride, the Lamb’s wife*” (Eph. v. 27; Rev. xxi. 9; Heb. xii. 23. See also John xiv. 3; 1 Cor. xv. 51-54; 1 Thess. iv. 15-17). Doubtless the saints at Jerusalem had many meeting places throughout the city, but they were not *churches*, but all together comprised *the church* at Jerusalem, and the same applies to Antioch or to Corinth, etc. So we have *a church* in a city; *churches* in a province or country; and *the universal Church* on earth. See Gal. i. 2; 1 Thess. ii. 14; 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 19; 2 Cor. viii. 1; Rev. i. 4. That Christ, the Head, is now in heaven, while His Body is here on earth, is clear from Acts ix. 4; “*Why persecutest thou ME?*” The “*ME*” is His Body on earth. And the risen and glorified Head of the Church has made the same identical *provision* for “*all that in every place call upon His Name*” (1 Cor. i. 2), for they all are His members, and all are one. If there is no Church of God on earth, what is Christ coming for? We thought He was coming to take His Church up to heaven. . . .

. . . Unity does not at all depend on all assembling within a single apartment. This would make it material. It is really in the power of the Holy Spirit . . . Hence we never hear of ‘*churches*’ but solely of ‘*the church*’ in a city as in Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, etc.; though we read of ‘*the churches*’ of Judea, Galatia, Macedonia, Asia, etc . . . Independency is therefore the direct negation of that unity of the saints in one body here below. There was but one communion on earth. ‘*God set*’ gifts in *the church*.

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Scripture recognizes no such thought as membership or gift in a church.”*

* Napoleon Noel, *The History of the Brethren*, vol. 1, Denver, Colo.: W. F. Knapp, 1936, pp. 259-260, 304.

The Brethren movement held strongly to the geographic principle of one assembly in each city. However, we see the same abuse that we saw in the Roman Catholic Church eventually taking place in the “exclusive,” or “closed,” Brethren’s practice of the ground of the church. J. N. Darby, the most prominent in ministry and leadership among the Brethren, acted and related to the assemblies in a pontifical way, approving of the excommunicating of whole assemblies because they did not agree with him on church discipline. Darby felt that all the assemblies must act in a uniform way. This uniformity of practice among the closed Brethren became a terrible abuse of the ground of oneness. Dr. H. A. Ironside, in his book *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement*, relates something of the disintegrating and exclusive atmosphere that came in as a result of these abuses:

The thirty years following the Bethesda break were, as we have seen, the flood-tide for the Exclusive section of the Brethren. The ebb was bound to come but few expected it to come so soon. Yet keen observers inside the fellowship had, for long, predicted disaster as they saw the ever-

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increasing evidences of weakness, — the growing ecclesiastical pretension, spiritual pride, and scarcely-concealed contempt on the part of many for less-instructed believers; all of which had resulted slowly but none the less surely in a gradual narrowing-down of the fellowship and restricting of communion. Mr. Darby's early thought that he only desired to see "what would serve as an available mount of communion where all godly believers could meet," had, despite his frequent protests, been superseded by a system of teaching that the fellowship of saints was largely a fellowship of meetings governed by the same principles and recognizing one another's disciplinary acts. . . .

It seems that it was one rule of the solemn game of "playing church," to use Mr. Wigram's expression, that there could be only one church in a city. There might be many meetings, as in London and elsewhere, but all must be recognized as one . . .*

* H. A. Ironside, *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1942, pp. 83, 84.

In his book *The Story of the Brethren Movement*, Thomas Stewart Veitch describes the compromise and abuse in Darby's practice of the ground of oneness, and his consequent rejection of brothers. A letter from G. V. Wigram (author of *The Englishman's Greek-English Concordance*) to J. N. Darby precipitated an action that would have far-reaching effects in the Brethren's practice of the church:

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G. V. Wigram and the “Central Meeting.”

A letter of a different type is that addressed by Mr. Wigram in 1838 to Mr. Darby. He writes: “There is a matter exercising the minds of some of us at this present time, in which you may be (and in some sense certainly are) concerned. The question I refer to is, ‘How are the meetings for communion of Saints in these parts to be regulated?’ Would it be for the glory of God and the increase of testimony to have one Central Meeting, the common responsibility of all within reach, and as many meetings subordinate to it as grace might vouchsafe, or to hold it to be better to allow the meetings to grow up as they may, without connection and dependent upon the energy of individuals only? . . . truly provided that there be in London some place where the wanderer can find rest and communion, my desire is met; though the glory of the Lord will, of course, be still to be cared for.” In this letter we have the first suggestion of the linking up of the Assemblies —

The Federation of Assemblies

— which Mr. Darby denounced in 1828, and also the germ of the Central Meeting which controlled and dominated “Exclusivism.”

In support of the “Central Meeting,” Mr. Darby pointed out that while the New Testament speaks of the “churches” of a province, it always refers to the “Church” in a town. Hence he taught that all the believers in the various Assemblies within the civil administrative area called London were one Church. The delimitation of the Church by municipal boundaries had strange effects. Woolwich and

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Islington are eight miles distant on opposite sides of the Thames, but, being within the area, are within the same Church, while Plumstead, though it closely adjoins Woolwich, is not.

Following on the suggestion in Mr. Wigram's letter, a room was hired in Central London for Saturday Evening Conferences, at which all questions such as receiving into fellowship and cutting off in the Assemblies within the area were decided. These decisions were binding within the area, and from the prestige which the London meetings held far beyond it. In the strong hands of Mr. Darby, the Central Meeting proved an instrument by which he controlled and dominated the Assemblies.

Mr. Neatby writes: "Darby's influence, for example, would have sufficed in the long run to secure the expulsion of any teacher, no matter how honoured a name he bore, or how strongly he was entrenched in the love and esteem of the Church in which he laboured."

While conceding that the Church of God is the aggregate of all believers in Christ, and the local Church is a similar local aggregate, the "Exclusive" Assemblies claimed that their meeting in any place was

The Sole "Expression" of the Church of God

there. It was Divinely recognised: nothing else was. In 1864 Mr. Darby, writing to Mr. Spurr of Sheffield regarding the case of a Mr. Goodall, says: "He (or any one else) is rejected in London. The Assembly in London have weighed, and I with them, the case and counted him as either excommunicated or in Schism. I put the two cases, for I only speak of the principle. I take part in this act, and

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hold him to be *outside the Church of God on earth*, being outside (in either case) what represents it in London, I am bound by Scripture to count them so. I come to Sheffield: there he breaks bread and is — in what? *Not in the Church of God on earth, for he is out of it in London, and there are not two Churches on earth, cannot be, so as to be in one and out of another.*”*

* Thomas Stewart Veitch, *The Story of the Brethren Movement*, London: Pickering & Inglis, n.d., pp. 59-62.

Eventually, the sad results of the abuse of the ground of oneness among the exclusive, or closed, Brethren were expressed in their narrow, rigid, and sectarian attitude toward other believers who did not fit into their system. H. A. Ironside, in his book about the Brethren, tells a fitting story to illustrate these results:

Those who read *The Truth* must have seen that the men and ministers of any denomination, system, or sect, who depart from the Word of God are not spared, whether they are Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, or by whatever name they are called. Who are the “Brethren,” that they should be exempt from merited criticism, when they go astray from the sacred Scriptures?

The very claim they make, that those who mention their faults and failures are guilty of a sort of profanation and sacrilege, shows their arrogant assumption of constituting the only true and infallible church. It is a claim, equal

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in effect of that of the Roman Catholic or the highest church Episcopalian, which says, "You may assail others, but you must not touch the 'Brethren.'" They remind one of a little meeting place in London, in which some branch of the "Brethren" assembled, that had over the door a strip of cloth bearing the inscription, "JESUS ONLY." By the wind, or in some other way, the first three letters of His name were torn off, so that the sign read, "US ONLY."*

* H. A. Ironside, *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement*, Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1942, pp. 200-201.

Surely the practice of one church in a city is a precious truth and should be practiced with great care in the Spirit. Nevertheless, the lessons of history remind us that Satan seeks to corrupt any proper practice of the church. Paul knew this when writing the passage on warfare related to the church in Ephesians chapter 6. The church is always the object of attack by God's enemy in this universe. So Christ must be central in our practice. May the Lord grant us much grace to stand on the ground of oneness for the expression of Christ until He comes! May we be simple and pure toward Christ and toward one another, and enjoy all the major factors of our common oneness. Amen!

