

LECTURE IV

MULTITUDINOUS AND GATHERED

THE Ecumenical Movement within Christendom has led religious groups to study seriously both their own position and the position of others; and one result has been the re-discovery of the vastness of the extent and importance of what they possess in common, as compared with what distinguishes them from one another. One man may vary slightly from another in race, intelligence, taste or income, but from the point of view of biological history the difference is not striking. It is the surface of the ocean that interests the traveller, and yet that is scarcely the ocean at all. And one might be surprised to find how far Churches which seem to be almost contradictory opposites may turn out to be unlike rather by way of emphasis than because of anything constitutional. This suggests that with respect to some matters what may be required is not so much change of principle as change of proportion.

As a marginal case this adjustment of balance might even involve accepting alongside of our special attitude, the attitude of our direct opponents in order to comprehensiveness and adequacy. Hebert, in his *Throne of David*,¹ quotes Ephraem Syrus's description of the Prophets "with variety of sounds" emitting similitudes of Christ. Some of these similitudes strongly contradict one another, but they are calmly placed side by side; and that reminds us how unfastidious is poetry in this matter of contradictions, how much religion has suffered from Greek metaphysics and Latin legalisms, and generally from merely logical and intellectual distinctions in theology, and how much more is required for appreciation and understanding and true judgment. Thus one realises with Emerson and with Chesterton that consistency is not the highest of virtues, and one does not expect it in Augustine or Luther any more than in the Bible, and above all one recalls what Carlyle and Turgenev have to teach us about the place of charity in relation to criticism. The truth will not be reached by compromise, nor by reducing tensions, and adequacy involves the compossibility and toleration

of opposites to an extent that may well strain our capacity for conviction and brotherhood. The fullness of Christ implies Both-And, at least as much as Either-Or. It may therefore be thought-provoking to examine one of the more fundamental points of divergence between denominations, and to consider whether it is not ultimately reducible to a matter of emphases capable of a healthy and helpful co-existence within a recognisable unity.

I

Religious bodies seem to be fairly easily classified as "multitudinous" or "gathered." De Quincey² tells us how it was suggested that a subject specially suitable for treatment by the genius of Coleridge was a history of Christianity and in particular "its chief divarications into Church and Sect." This distinction has been made a commonplace by Troeltsch. Sometimes the types are contrasted as "institutional" and "spiritual," though perhaps "personal" better describes the last.

Emil Brunner, in an article on "One Holy Catholic Church,"³ stated not long ago that in the New Testament the Church is never an "institution," but simply "the people of God," "the fellowship of men who have been renewed through Christ, and are united with their Lord"; that later, the Church was "institutionalised" and that Protestantism was basically a protest against this, but that the Reformed Churches tend to relapse into the institutional, and to be lacking in a true and vital fellowship in Christ, or, alternatively, tend to become mere ecclesiastical associations resulting from a federation of individual believers. Stress is laid upon the word "fellowship." The Church is a fellowship of those bound together into a body through Jesus Christ, each member fundamentally a priest. The Church is a fellowship of holy people.

Karl Barth⁴ has also latterly expressed himself in this way, urging that "we should learn once more when we hear the word 'Church' to think, not only of the existence and subsistence of a 'fellowship,' but in connection with both these words to think of the 'event' of a gathering-together," and while repudiating the view that we are concerned merely with believing individuals coming together of their own free will to form a community,

he employs the expression "men gathered together as Christians in a living community of the Lord Jesus Christ," and hints that the Congregational Church polity may prove to be the most satisfying. In 1943, in discussing Baptism, Barth had attacked "*Volkskirche und Staatskirche and Massenkirche.*" The *Dogmatik in Grundriss* (1947) insists that the Church exists by "*göttliche convocatio,*" and calls attention to the danger where the Church is thought of rather in close relationship with ordinary society. His attitude is in accord with his whole reaction to ecclesiastical experience in connection with National Socialism, and would not be unnatural even in the light of the preceding Lutheran arrangement, while at the same time it fits in with Kierkegaardian individualism.

Kierkegaard's early nineteenth-century acute but fierce attack upon what he called Christendom deserves to be carefully pondered. The assault is directed against the exaggerated Erastianism of the Danish State Church of his day, but it is in greater or less degree applicable to all "Churches" in Troeltsch's sense of the word. In the *Attack*, as elsewhere in his writings, Kierkegaard⁶ is devastating in his criticism of the merely formal and official Church and clergy: official patter, conventional phrases; "That's his business," say the people. Instead of salt, religion becomes "twaddle." Priests are interested in a snug living, promotion, family comfort. Things are just as they were under paganism, but now we call it Christendom! We apply the predicate "Christian." In "Christendom" we are all Christians, without having the slightest suspicion as to what Christianity is. Religion has been abolished by flourishing. The way is no longer narrow. Christianity is not taken seriously; it is merely a game. There is no more cross and suffering as with Jesus, but "merrily we roll along," complacent because of the assurance that "the thing about eternity is settled," and we can go on enjoying life like the pagans. It is, of course, important for the priests that people should not find out what Christianity really is, for the whole institution as it now exists would then collapse. Members must be retained, if only for financial reasons. There is no thought that becoming a Christian presupposes consciousness of sin, and of oneself as a sinner. Baptism is reduced to a polite ceremonial. Our religion is no more the real thing than "tea

made with a bit of paper, which once lay in a drawer beside another bit of paper, which once had been used to wrap a few dried tea leaves, from which tea had already been made three times."

This carries us back to the contrast between what is sometimes called (though without much reason) the Church of the Catacombs, and the Church of Constantine into which the world poured. Later we see missionary efforts bringing in whole tribes and races by mass evangelisation, the conversion of a chief, perhaps for political or cultural reasons, involving the nominal conversion of his people, Christianity being stretched to cover many of their superstitions, their holy wells being christened, their sacred sites adapted for Christian worship. For a very long time the only way in which anything could flourish was by official patronage and support of this sort with the inevitable measure of control. The modern "multitudinous" Church with its basic problem of the nominal Christian continues in true succession from this, and has been accustomed to collaborate with the world and to hallow firmly established practices. Against this kind of thing Donatism, Jansenism, Puritanism, and such movements were the natural protests, and repeatedly in history, when formalism became unbearable, as, for example, in fifteenth-century Germany or seventeenth-century France, we find the pious turning within and becoming contemplative mystics; but all types of "gathered" Church are an obvious result of dissatisfaction with the "multitudinous."

Primitive religion appears to have been mainly communal. The community in a state of infancy is unable to express itself, but is directed by some ruler or leader. Thus it was with the Israelites in the days of Moses and long after. Only in the highest prophetic writings and some of the Psalms does the personal emerge in religion. Primitive religion is also something done, rather than something thought. It is indeed possible in undeveloped conditions for considerable variety of opinion to exist unquestioned, and no trouble would arise till religion came to be associated rather with personal outlook than with formal and external acts. Thus, as Dr. Berkhof has pointed out in his *De Kerk en de Keizer*,⁶ Christianity for Constantine was precisely what pagan religion had formerly been for the Empire,

a public custom; and when people in the new peace began to introduce theological issues and to discuss problems of orthodoxy, this seemed to the Emperor to be personal and not a matter of cult, and therefore irrelevant and to be firmly suppressed as interfering with his plan for imperial unity.

Some Christians had, of course, realised the inwardness of true Christianity in the early days. Tertullian, for example, had, under official opposition, stated that: "It is assuredly no part of religion to compel religion, to which free will and not force should lead us"; and Lactantius says: "If the mind of the worshipper is disinclined to it, religion at once ceases to exist," and "it is religion alone in which freedom has placed its dwelling."⁷ Barth has questioned "whether the State has any right to try to strengthen its authority by making any kind of inward claim upon its subjects and its citizens: that is, whether it has any right to demand from them a particular philosophy of life."⁸ The totalitarian State does not trouble to answer the question, but it makes the demand. In earlier times, however, the religious situation did not normally raise this particular issue. Thus in the England of Queen Elizabeth uniformity of religious observance was required by the religious settlement; but it was expressly stated that the Queen "meaneth not to enter into the inquisition of any men's consciences, as long as they shall observe her laws by their open deeds."⁹ Nor was this a deliberate encouragement of hypocrisy; religious observance was regarded as cult, and not as committing anyone to personal acceptance of particular opinions. Religion was not treated as a matter of conviction or principles or as belonging to a province where conscience was specially involved. It might appear that in Eastern Europe the cult has remained almost overwhelmingly prominent, and individual opinion has not specially asserted itself in connection with Christianity. The place given to the sacraments and the relatively small amount of theological development in the course of centuries in Eastern Orthodox lands would seem to support this view. Perhaps this helps to explain how rulers still think it possible to tolerate Christianity in Communist states. If they believe that Christianity is chiefly a matter of rites and ceremonies, then they may see no great difficulty in the Church having perfect freedom to do its work.

The same is true as regards the pietist, who may be content with liberty in the sphere of sentiment, and be prepared to isolate his religious experience from the rest of life, concerning himself with spiritual rebirth, study of the Bible and of devotional literature, prayer and the building up of character in communion with other earnest souls. He may be able to accept a Nazi or Communist instruction to "mind his own business." Some of the sects have on principle refrained from taking any share in politics.

II

But the "multitudinous" Church in Western Protestantism has generally been most intimately associated with the whole life of the community. In Old Testament times worship was that of "the people of God," and this, as Brunner has noted, continued to be characteristic of the Christian Church for a thousand years. Gregory Dix¹⁰ has pointed out that in the Early Church "the Eucharist as a whole was a corporate act of the whole Church," wherein every "order," from the layman to the bishop, had its own special "liturgy," everyone's contribution being necessary to the whole. But not only strictly religious observance was a function of the community, the work of a priesthood of all believers, for in the long stretch of the Middle Ages, as Christopher Dawson¹¹ reminds us, what we call Christendom developed with the infiltration of Christian influences into general thought and practice. At the Reformation there was something of a revival of the Old Testament theocratic conception of the State. Berkhof¹² is justified in alluding in this connection to Calvin, Knox, Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, and the ideas of Groen van Prinsterer and of Hoedemaker with his "*beel de kerk en beel het volk.*" In fact, however, it was the State that emerged victorious, and the multitudinous Church became the State Church, more or less a part of the national system. Hooker¹³ in a famous sentence identified Church and community, and England has remained mildly Erastian, oppression and persecution being for long involved, and outward acceptance of the State religion being required of all in positions of trust, a condition only finally eliminated in the later nineteenth century, by which time the State Church had been obliged by

pressure of public opinion to forgo a number of its privileges. Within the Church of England itself the High Church party ever since the Oxford Movement has felt the disadvantages of the arrangement to be clearer than the advantages, and the present Archbishop of York¹⁴ has recently written strongly in favour of spiritual independence.

State connection has so often in real life meant State control that spiritual restlessness is natural with regard to it, and dis-establishment has become a principle with many Nonconformists so that they regard State relationship as not merely risky, but wrong. There is, however, no sense in generalising about the proper connection between Church and State, since these words have become so elastic in significance that each particular situation must be studied by itself. The same arrangement would in different centuries and countries show very different results. It has to be considered whether State means community, laity, dictator party, nineteenth-century policeman or twentieth-century welfare control; whether government is friendly, hostile or indifferent; whether there is a single or a dominant Church or many denominations; what the religion amounts to and what the clergy are like; besides which the stage of social development as to education, finance, class divisions, civil law, standards of official life and much else would have to be examined. What may be a wise scheme in one set of circumstances may be plainly unsuitable in another. One must neither make a devil of "Erastianism," nor an idol of "Christian liberty."

The Church in any period may be either leading or following, may be either of Samuel or of Eli. Where there is any considerable government influence or close identification of Church and community, the Church, like the Press, will reflect the general moral and spiritual condition: like people, like priest. Religious worship becomes a sort of gilt edging. The National Church tends to adopt the conception of a National God: "*Gott mit uns.*" It is committed to the official standpoint of the State, and even to being the apologist for national blunders and sins. Preaching in such cases is an echo, though it should be noticed that this can happen apart from any official connection, as it did, for example, in the American Civil War, when Southern Methodists upheld slavery as eloquently as others denounced it. But ordinarily the

Church will be, as Reinhold Niebuhr has put it, "a quasi-religious and quasi-cultural enterprise, which is frequently content to add a pious phrase to whatever value, cultural, social and political, the community may be pursuing."¹⁵ Constantine's idea, we should recall, like that of King David at Jerusalem and like that of pre-war Japan, was to have religion provide the emotional cement essential for successful political unity.

A Church cannot exist without some form of State recognition, for the citizen must live under the law; but the dangers of actual establishment are obvious. The present writer can remember being impressed as a student in Berlin before the First World War by the difference between the State theatre, where it was financially possible to have classical pieces presented and traditional taste maintained however public opinion might wander, but where progress and enterprise in acting, in staging and in everything else were not necessary and were in consequence not in evidence, and *die freie Bühne*, where in those days one heard Ibsen and everything that was then most forward, but only what the public of the moment wanted, good or bad, for the theatre had to pay its way, and the performers could only live by pleasing. The tendency is always to conservatism or to radicalism, to dust or whirl, to routine or novelty, to authority or private judgment, to the institutional or the personal, towards Laodiceanism or towards fanaticism. The established has a vested interest in "no change," and the free is concerned for "turnover." But we may not classify them as right or wrong.

III

It is no doubt a mistake to draw very sharp lines of distinction between types. Science even suggests that this can be said of the difference between the sexes. However latitudinarian a congregation, it will have a nucleus of the more zealous; and however strictly exclusive a sect, it will have its second generation to worry about. In order to be an influence in the community, it is not essential to live a public life, and modern political developments suggest that the "cell" is the secret of real control. But the multitudinous Church does have an opportunity in being directly in touch with the whole of community life, whereby religion may

be the salt in society, though not the staple diet. According to Thomas Aquinas,¹⁶ the Church is responsible for the ordering of human affairs as far as faith and morals are concerned, but here again the demarkation of boundaries is a hopeless task, and we might be content to think rather of the Church as concerned to make and to keep men and society Christian.

It is customary to speak of Protestantism as essentially individualistic. Romanists constantly do this, and the present writer has heard an Eastern Orthodox leader mention the story of the thief on the Cross as central for Protestants, because in it salvation is independent of ordinances. The pamphlet *Catholicity* says: "Again and again Protestantism betrays its tendency to put the individual before the Church."¹⁷ It was, it is true, the advance of the individual in the social life of Europe that made the Reformation possible, and individualism remains an important aspect of Protestantism; but normal Protestantism does not overlook the complementary aspect, community, just as Europe in the Reformation period did not exchange community for individual, but only improved itself and enriched itself by giving adequate encouragement to individualism. Obviously, it is only in co-operation that individual and community have meaning, and Protestantism will naturally be critical of systems which seem to grudge to the individual his full share in the combined spiritual operation. Not only the individualistic but also the community emphasis is capable of being overdone.

The "multitudinous" Church in Protestantism lays all due weight upon environment, the family, the covenant, the people of God, in which connection infant baptism may almost be regarded as its characteristic symbol; it notices that the Book of Revelation looks for a Holy City, a Christian community, and it also believes in a conformity to God in the whole individual man. Spurgeon, it is true, claimed that he could smoke a cigar to the glory of God, and John Clifford did much to turn the attention of Nonconformists to the importance of relating Christianity to the whole of life,¹⁸ but the "multitudinous" Church always had a charitable understanding of the world as definitely created by God and still His, avoiding what most irritated Matthew Arnold¹⁹ about Puritanism, the tendency "to sacrifice all other sides of our being to the religious side." There is a church spire

for all to see, a bell for all to hear, and a minister to be every man's father in God. When one condescends to details, the church may be cold, the bell far from sweet and the minister not particularly eloquent, for the mark of this system is goodwill rather than efficiency; but even if it does, to use phrases of Disraeli,²⁰ sometimes tend to "paralytic tenuity," this is no more of a disease than the "apoplectic plethora" which is the trouble elsewhere.

The separatist may be in danger of undervaluing the Church, but the Church "multitudinous" supports the view associated with Cyprian and Augustine, but equally prominent in Calvin and the *Westminster Confession*, that outside the Church there is no ordinary means of salvation. This does not, of course, imply that God is bound though we are. Hebert quotes from the Russian theologian Khomiakoff to show that the Eastern Orthodox idea of the Church "is the explicit denial of the common assumption that Christianity means the free access of individuals to God, each for himself: it is the assertion that the only way to God is to come to Him *en Christo*—that is, as a member of Christ's mystical Body."²¹ We have likewise Archbishop Laud's pointed objection to the strained individualist trend of certain Independents: "If any man is so addicted to his private, that he neglect the common, state, he is void of the sense of piety, and wisheth place and happiness to himself in vain. For whoever he is, he must live in the body of the commonwealth, and in the body of the Church."²²

The eyes of the "multitudinous" Church turn also to security. The Church is the Ark, and the dove that leaves it finds no rest for the sole of her foot. For those who are strongly averse from authority it is a case of "Lo, here is Christ," "Lo, there." We note, too, a different doctrine of the Holy Spirit, the "multitudinous" being complacent as to revelation, and looking to the Spirit for interpretation and exposition of the truth once delivered, believing the Spirit to express Himself normally only in and through the Church, in contrast to those who eagerly listen for what the Spirit may be saying to the Churches by way of startling disclosures of undreamt of new thought. Similarly, there is a difference of view with respect to Faith and Works.

The "multitudinous" Church finds itself in line with present-

day emphasis upon community. National recognition of religion would seem to be very much in harmony with the general trend. On the other hand, the modern process of secularisation has been making a steady advance, and it has seemed as if the Church was being forced into narrower and narrower channels of activity and influence. Long ago it lost its patronage of music, painting and architecture; more recently it has lost control of education, the care of the poor and sick, and parochial moral discipline. But it has to be recognised that Christian influences are not thereby necessarily excluded from these departments, and the Church's service to humanity in creating public interest in such matters has been decisive and amounts to a very great achievement. Society has at least been made so far Christian that much is now generally assumed which would not otherwise have been accepted. There is a recognisable minimum of truth in calling this a Christian country. It remains for the Church through its members to continue to exert a Christian influence on every sphere of public and private life: that is its business, for its end is still a Christian community, the Kingdom of God.

An obvious characteristic of the "multitudinous" Church is the inclusiveness which the word implies. In the early Church Callixtus was not prepared to drive any sinner into paganism and damnation, and whereas Hippolytus thought of the Ark as that by which the few were saved, he regarded it rather as that wherein were beasts clean and unclean. The church of God which was at Corinth included some questionable characters: the Book of the Acts tells us of Ananias and of quarrels between Greek and Jewish Christians, and between individual Christian leaders. The history of the Church thereafter reveals similar features. Augustine²³ recognised that there might be "very many wolves within," and he pointed out pertinently in another connection that "He said, The reapers are the angels; He said not, The reapers are the captains of the circumcelliones." And surely the parables of the Tares and of the Dragnet are decisive, and should prevent what T. S. Eliot calls "the Church's abandonment of all those who are not by their wholehearted profession within the fold."²⁴

There is no reason why a State Church ought to imply any strict uniformity. The Jewish Church had acquiesced in

Pharisaism; the pre-Reformation Church made allowance for the peculiarly zealous through monasticism; the Roman Church has distinguished saints from other Christians, has encouraged or tolerated orders, and has counsels of perfection as well as general precepts. Luther's system seems to open the way for both *Volkskirche* and *Freiwilligkeitskirche* or *Gemeinde*,²⁵ and Scandinavian state Churches appear to have permitted pietistic developments within their framework. The Labadists²⁶ in seventeenth-century Holland, like the Wesleyans in eighteenth-century England, saw no cause to break with the national Church. Within the Church of England there are parties, and in the Dutch Reformed Church there are "directions," which involve differences greater than those which have sometimes given rise to separate denominations.

IV

The conception of the "gathered" Church derives from such scripture as Matt. xviii. 20: "Where two or three are gathered together"; Deut. iv. 10: "Gather me the people together and I will make them hear my word"; Mic. ii. 12: "I will surely gather the remnant of Israel"; but the "gathered" Church is itself a natural phenomenon, for in every community some are abler or keener than the average, and it was so in the Church. At certain periods there was the possibility of martyrdom as a distinction, and later those who were not content with being merely as good as their neighbours became hermits or adhered to some order; but it did not occur to anyone that all should be monks. It is simply a matter of the few and the many; a double standard introduced itself, and it persists in all societies. When times of peace induced routine and laxity and formalism, there were always some to become disgusted and to react violently and even to make an idol of strictness, so that century after century had its Montanists, Novatianists, Donatists, Lollards, Puritans or Oxford Group. When such people looked back to the New Testament, they discovered something like themselves in the beginnings of local churches, which, as Harnack and Latourette confirm, were necessarily little groups of believers and enquirers, who were not always brought together in any official manner or by any official person, but who while

naturally looking to Jerusalem and the Apostolic circle for example and guidance and eager to profit by a letter or a visit, were very largely independent, and in some cases may have moved along different lines of thought and practice. Later they would find themselves obliged to fall into step and would become automatically recognised as of the one Church. Such primitive and possibly irregular early Church gatherings have no special virtue or claim to imitation to-day, but they did give rise to one of the three outstanding "divine right" theories which for long prevailed. The idea of separation was, of course, something different and was due to a certain interpretation of the word "holiness" as applied to the Church.

The "gathered" Church flourished amazingly in seventeenth-century England, having started with small groups whose religious idiosyncrasies brought them into difficulties with the authorities, and who came to make a principle of their separateness. Robert Browne²⁷ even earlier declared that the Church consists of "the worthiest, were they never so few," and that Christians must avoid "all ungodly communion with wicked persons." John Robinson spoke of the true Church as "separated from the world" and "gathered into the name of Christ by a covenant."²⁸ Henry Jacob described it as "a number of faithful people joined by their willing consent in a spiritual outward society."²⁹ John Smyth referred to "two, three or more saints joined together by covenant with God . . . according to the Word for their mutual edification and God's glory."³⁰

One group in England in 1644 are described by themselves as a voluntary company of saints, separated from the world by the fact of regeneration and the symbol of believers' baptism, practising in mutual agreement the ordinances of the Master; and Robert Baillie, looking at them from the Presbyterian ranks, says: "They began to teach that the Church behoved to consist of no other members but such as were, not in profession and aim alone, but also visibly and really holy and elect, and therefore that new churches behoved to be gathered, and that all the old anywhere extant behoved to be separated from as mixed and so corrupted societies."³¹

Modern statements which help to make the position clear may be quoted: "Only one thing makes a Church, not officers,

not creeds, not sacraments, but believing men and women, those who have been saved by Christ and gathered together into a fellowship of the divine life" (A. Peel, 1937); "A voluntary society of those who are called, redeemed and sanctified by Jesus Christ, and who are banded together to reproduce His life and serve His ends in the world" (W. B. Selbie, 1927). Baptists are described by Hugh Martin (1941) as "called out by God from humanity in general as consciously redeemed and separated to the divine service."³²

It is noticeable in modern documents for which representatives of Independent Churches are responsible how seriously they insist both that such groups are not human voluntary associations, but have their origin in the activity of God; and that they are not isolated in the sense of being unrelated to other Christian groups but are essentially local representations of the one Church. This is important, and brings out the truth that community spirit and individualism are never in fact so completely apart as is often stated, and that both must always be recognised in a true Church. Robert Baillie³³ mischievously complained in his day that Independency was becoming "a uniting principle"; even that stage is now long past.

About such Churches it is naturally difficult to make general statements, for there are many opinions current within them; but F. D. Maurice, in spite of his intimacy with non-Anglicans, seems unfair in describing a sect as merely a group of people with peculiar opinions who voluntarily call themselves a society, as contrasted with the Church, which is a body called into being by God and grounded upon His will.³⁴ A Statement approved by the Council of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland in March, 1948, says: "Such churches are gathered by the will of Christ. . . . They do not have their origin, primarily, in human resolution." We might accept J. H. Oldham's verdict that "All hold that the Church is not merely a human organisation, but a community of which Jesus Christ is the living Lord."³⁵

The Baptist document above quoted also states: "Such gathered companies of believers are the local manifestation of the one Church of God on earth as in heaven." D. T. Jenkins, in his *The Nature of Catholicity*,³⁶ perhaps overstates this point; but it is interesting to have had it well brought out by John

Robinson himself, who declared: "There is but one body, the Church, and but one Lord or Head of that body, Christ: and whosoever separates from the body, the Church, separates from the head, Christ."³⁷

In early days the "gathered" Church had its own distinctive weaknesses; there was a temptation to self-righteousness, narrowness, cant, lack of charity, an appeal to people whose emotions were less under restraint, whose education did not protect them from being carried away by sound and fury, and who were easily influenced by fears and imaginings. They provided an opening also for such as had read a little, and were proud of it, and could express themselves with some fluency in discussion, or who pored over the Bible till they made strange discoveries upon which they built up opinions and presently principles. The "gathered" Church was less friendly to the world, concentrating upon the spiritual and moral, and its earnestness and warmth and fellowship attracted some who felt chilled and unimpressed by snobbery and dull prosing and the paralysis of complacency. Class distinctions entered into the situation; and in England the Nonconformists were seriously handicapped, as well as alienated, by exclusion from the universities and by similar discouragements.

John Calvin, as has been repeatedly pointed out, was concerned both for individual and for community. Only individuals could be saved and that by personal faith responding to grace, and yet this could normally only happen to them through the organised Church, whose function was nothing less than the redemption of society, the production and maintenance of a Christian community. Thus support may be found in Calvin for both "multitudinous" and "gathered" Church; but it should be noted that his particular statements are all to be considered in the light of his ultimate theocratic principle: his Church of holy persons, and the entire Christian community, were ideally one and the same. He was aware of the faults in the one direction as illustrated by Romanism, and he was equally alive to the dangers of the other as revealed by extreme Anabaptists.

His view is clear from the following passage from his *Commentary on Acts*: "There arise many inconveniences also even from the growth of the Church, for it is a hard matter to keep many hypocrites from creeping into the multitude. . . . Opinions

also differ, so that one thing cannot please all alike. This offence causeth many to be desirous to choose a few for a Church; it causeth them to loathe or else to hate a multitude. No trouble, however, no irksomeness, ought so much to prevail but that we must . . . cherish, so much as in us lieth, unity with the whole body."³⁸

In the *Institutio* he states plainly the "multitudinous" view of the visible Church as the whole body of professing Christians, and emphasises the need for an organised Church, with ministers and ordinances. On the other hand, his idea of the Church was a body of faithful men; he did not regard the sacraments as necessary for salvation; he believed in the excommunication of the unworthy; he emphasises the authority of the Word as compared with the traditions of the Church; speaks of election and of the fewness of the elect; teaches the need of faith and its relationship to knowledge; accepts immediacy of access in place of priestly meditation; all this tending to the individualist and spiritual and thus to the "gathered" view of the nature of the Church. This aspect of Calvin's thought has been rightly pointed out by August Lang and Hermann Bauke.³⁹

V

The Scots doctrine of the Nature of the Church shows something of the comprehensive Calvinist attitude. On the whole, Scotland took the traditional view that external profession of faith and partaking of the sacraments was what the Church required of a member. That he was a converted person or an exemplary moral character was therefore quite definitely not demanded, though it would be hoped that, if he were not such, his Church connection might have that result. James Wood puts the matter plainly when he writes: "Admission of members into the Church invisible is the work of God by the operation of the Spirit in effectual calling and ingrafting men into Christ. Admission of members into the Church visible and according to its external state is committed to the pastors and rulers of the Church, who, being men, and so not seeing the inward constitution and condition of hearts, must look at things obvious to the senses, in their administration of this work."⁴⁰ David

Dickson says: "As among the virgins in the parable so in the visible Church, all are not wise Christians, but some wise and really such as they profess themselves to be, others are counterfeit Christians and foolish."⁴¹ Samuel Rutherford declares that to be members of the Church implies only "that they be within the net, hearers of the Word," with "a professed willingness to receive the Gospel."⁴² And John Dickie, writing in 1930, speaks of the Church as "Christ's instrument for winning the world to Himself . . . God's school for the discipline of Christian character. . . . We have never either presumed to penetrate the inner secrets of the human heart, or tried to make inquisitorial investigation as to the standing of the individual with God."⁴³

By its Articles Declaratory (1921), the Church of Scotland acknowledged "its distinctive call and duty to bring the ordinances of religion to the people in every parish of Scotland through a territorial ministry."⁴⁴ It is the national Church, and has always been so since allegiance to the Pope was renounced in 1560; and for long there was but one "face of Kirk" permitted within the Kingdom, to which Church all inhabitants were assumed to belong and to which, if they desired to be considered respectable and to enjoy citizen rights, they did in fact belong. Kirk Session discipline was a symbol that the spiritual and moral life of the whole community was under Church control. The education of the young and the care of the poor and sick of the entire community were likewise undertaken by the Church. The Covenants were national documents.

James Durham in the seventeenth century realised that this implied priority of whole to parts;⁴⁵ and the Church of Scotland Commission for the Interpretation of God's Will (1943) states that the meeting together of Christians "proceeded from their knowledge that they already were a single community—a community which had been called of God"; "individual calling meant calling into the membership of the Church."⁴⁶ But on a national scale this involves the case of many who take no active part in Church life and who, though not hostile, are linked to it by the slenderest threads; and while, like Calvin at Geneva, the Church by discipline and catechising and the permeation of social life by Christian principle, endeavoured to develop a worthy standard, it at the same time reckoned even the most erring to

be within its net, and the whole population to be its field of operations. Theoretically, that is still its position. There it is in every parish, and even if no one may seem to want it, there it remains, proclaiming the Word that is necessary for salvation, refusing to despair of anyone, remembering that the Prodigal could not sin away the fact of his sonship. One of the reasons for the Disruption of 1843 was the consciousness on the part of Thomas Chalmers and his friends that the Church was being prevented from fulfilling its duty of declaring the Gospel in the new industrial areas.⁴⁷ In more recent times the Church of Scotland has given ample evidence of interest in social problems and public questions, especially through its Committees on Social Service and on Church and Nation.

Following the lead of Calvin, the Scottish Reformers had attempted to make worship more popular, and to give the congregation a share such as they had not formerly had in the service of God's House. The metrical versions of the Psalms had this in view, appealed to the people and were within their capacity, "loosening the tongues of the silenced people," as Dr. Millar Patrick has said, "by restoring to them the right and the power to use their own understandings and voices in the common praise of God."⁴⁸ Family worship was encouraged, and education had a spiritual purpose and helped them to appreciate the Bible and to follow the minister's exposition of it. For many generations the services of the Sunday in the parish church, however crude and bleak they may now seem to us to have been, were the one real community bond. The Church and only the Church reminded the people of their unity and of their common divine vocation and of their mutual obligations, and constituted the source and inspiration of their fellowship. This note of fellowship was peculiarly characteristic of Scottish Communion services.

But there were quarters in which the qualities of the "multi-tudinous" Church made little impression. A national Church includes a wide range of spiritual types, and the Church of Scotland, like the Church of England, does not make an idol of uniformity. H. Burn-Murdoch, in his *Church, Continuity and Unity*, does not take sufficient notice of this, but keeps on quoting views which are certainly held, but are not, as he implies,

representative of the Church of Scotland as a whole. Sectarianism at first made little headway in Scotland. In the Cromwellian period it was markedly unsuccessful. John Wesley also made relatively little impression. The Haldanes in the early nineteenth century were the first to create serious interest of this kind.

But the individualist side of the Reformation had always had influence, and sometimes appeared in exaggerated form. The *Letters* of Samuel Rutherford and the *Memoirs* of Thomas Boston provide evidence of this; and Evangelical preaching generally was prophetic and radical and aimed at changing the heart of the individual, who is represented as all alone in a conflict with the devil in which victory is available by the special intervention of divine grace, but in which the Church appears to play no part at all.

The eighteenth-century Secessions also showed less concern for the Church than for the individual, as we can see from the stress laid upon conscience as over against authority. There was strong criticism of "promiscuous" Communion, and actually some danger of an Antinomianism that kept on insisting: "Christ is my righteousness."⁴⁹ There were Praying Societies, consisting of anxious lay people, whose interest in religion was profoundly personal, their aim, as expressed by John Brown of Wamphray,⁵⁰ being to refuge themselves from the storm of wrath under the wings of Christ, hiding themselves from the avenger of blood, the wrath of an angry God. Such persons naturally thought of their relationship to Christ before their relationship to the Church. Thus even James Bannerman, representing Free Church scholarship, while insisting that the Church is "not merely a voluntary association," but "a divine institution," says: "When Christ, through the mighty operation of His Spirit, brings a sinner into reconciliation and communion with Himself, He ushers him also into the fellowship of reconciliation and communion with all other Christians."⁵¹ This would confirm, as far as certain Scottish Christians were concerned, the opinion of Schleiermacher⁵² that Protestantism made the individual's relation to the Church dependent on his relation to Christ, while Catholicism made the individual's relation to Christ dependent on his relation to the Church.

The break-up of the Scottish Church which began with the

Revolution Settlement destroyed its authority and discipline; the emergence of denominations created an entirely new situation. Incidentally, it encouraged secularisation. The collections of the Seceders were required largely for the support of Church ordinances and were lost to the parish poor, and this hastened the Poor Law of 1845, whereby the State took control. The United Presbyterians⁵³ showed increasing dislike of the State connection and eventually became disestablishmentarians, working also for the secularisation of education both in schools and universities. This was all in the direction of keeping religion a personal matter in a special sphere of its own, though the genuine Christian spirit could not but be charitable, and concern was shown for both social problems and missionary enterprise. Many of the Seceders also took an interest in democratic politics; and the same situation may be said to have existed in Scotland as is so amusingly illustrated in Dr. H. Townsend's *Claims of the Free Churches*, where in relation to the Reform Bill period, the author quotes⁵⁴ with approval *The Times* which had wrathfully told the Bishops to "confine themselves to superintending the souls of the faithful," and on the same page quotes, likewise approvingly, the very opposite sentiment expressed in Lord John Russell's "I know the Dissenters. They carried the Reform Bill."

VI

To sum up, the "multitudinous" Church has its keen nucleus, and the "gathered" congregation has individuals born into it, growing up perhaps with little genuine spiritual conviction and even experiencing conversion only conventionally. There may therefore be more difference in theory than in practice, and we find the institutional and the spiritual sides everywhere though in all varieties of proportion; but there seems to be supreme wisdom in J. H. Oldham's words: "Within the Church as an organised society, the true Church has to be continually re-created."⁵⁵ Or, as Samuel Rutherford wrote, "The Covenant external is made with a society or visible Church that out of them God may gather heirs of glory."⁵⁶

A Church like the Church of Scotland is in fact no longer the Church of all the people; it is not really the Church of the Parable

of the Tares; has it not more and more acquired, relatively speaking, the character of a "gathered" Church, a company called out by God from the wilderness of the World, though active for its cultivation and salvation? And as to the "gathered" Church a corresponding question may be asked. This type is to-day strongly represented in English Free Churches, whose claims have recently been represented by Principal Henry Townsend. The system has, as already noticed, received lately some valuable encouragement from Barth and Brunner. But for the most weighty fact one must turn to America, where a large proportion of the religious people belong to Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist and similar denominations.⁵⁷ Do these Churches of many millions consist entirely of the godly, or are they not to all intents and purposes "multitudinous," though with a different temperament, distinctive opinions and traditions and customs and vocabulary, from some generally so called? Presbyterians in America and in other countries where the system is not "established" would appear to belong in some respects to both camps.

In the United States "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion." That leaves the matter open as far as individual states are concerned; and the Church and State problem in a European sense does not arise, but in practice many states give to all the Churches very effective recognition, though none is officially established. The Christian era is the basis of present-day chronology, Sunday is a day in a special category, days of prayer are recommended to the people, Congress has daily prayers, Thanksgiving Day is associated with religious services, Churches are privileged in the matter of taxation, ministers of religion travel half-price on many railways, and the general ethical principles at least of private morality are supposed to be derived from Christianity. One unfortunate development has been that there is no traditional standard in relation to which, or in opposition to which, sectarian tendencies naturally test themselves, and the result has been a great deal of spiritual drift, with disastrous consequences and possibilities. There is, however, general recognition of Christianity resting upon public opinion, while at the same time even Romanism with its many millions is merely one sect among many, and a Swedish pastor

finds himself no longer a civil servant. America does provide evidence that some accommodation between "multitudinous" and "gathered" is a practical possibility.

The main point of difference between these two types everywhere lies in the understanding of the word "holiness." Otto's *Idea of the Holy* has helped to analyse for us this complex notion; and both Barth with his *Transcendence* and the Mystics with their Pantheism had their word to say. The early conception must have suggested separation, taboo, inaccessibility. The Old Testament says that whatever touches the altar is holy: this refers to ritual purity. We read of holy ground, holy day, holy covenant, holy name, holy city, the Holy One of Israel. The Jews were "an holy people unto the Lord"; but, except for some of the more exalted prophets, this was not because of anything spiritual or moral, but because of the ceremonial law by which they were partitioned off from other nations.

In the New Testament the conception is no longer bound to the physical; we hear of holy prophets, holy brethren, holy Apostles, holy angels, holy Scriptures, Holy Father. And the Church speaks of Holy Communion, and is itself described as holy,—“groweth into an holy temple in the Lord,” and its members holy,—“Be ye holy, for I am holy.” The Creeds refer to the Holy Church. The Catholic interprets this as implying the indwelling Spirit, and the fact that all members are baptised and so regenerate. Bishop Eric Graham⁵⁸ writes that the Church is called and constituted for holiness by the will of God, and is the covenanted sphere of the Holy Spirit's working, which is the process of sanctification. John Knox's *Book of Common Order* states: “The Church is holy, because it receiveth free remission of sins, . . . because, it being regenerate, it receiveth the spirit of sanctification. . . . Not that we think the justice of this Church, or of any member of the same, ever was, is or yet shall be so full and perfect, that it needeth not to stoop under mercy, but that because the imperfections are pardoned and the justice of Jesus Christ imputed unto such as by true faith cleave unto Him.”

Certain individuals and groups have aimed at spiritual and moral perfection, as in some cases under monasticism, striving to keep themselves unspotted from the world and living a life of entire devotion; and the Puritan interest in the hereafter

induced similar feelings towards the world and all forms of pleasure. The sectarian John Canne (1634) urged separation from the Church of England on the ground that it consisted of "profane people, as atheists, idolaters, sorcerers, blasphemers, and all sorts of miscreants and wicked livers."⁵⁹ It should be noted that the objection was not to the fact that people were sinners, but to the fact of their obduracy and impenitence after due warning given.

Most people have recognised that no Church, however select and however meticulously "gathered," could, on account of the spiritual and moral attainments of its constituents, lay claim to "holiness." The Church is holy because it belongs to God, and because of what Christ has done for those called into it. They may be holy by experience; the holiness of justification. But, generally speaking, there is emphasis on sanctification, and the duty of holiness and of imitation of Christ. Spener and other pietists attached much value to the pure life that should follow on pardon. John Willison of Dundee wrote of the Christian as "a man that is renewed inwardly by the Spirit of God, and aims at holiness."⁶⁰ But the holiness of the individual derives entirely from his redemption, and the holiness of the Church, as Aulén expresses it, "rests on the finished and continuous work of Christ."⁶¹ Thus "holy things for holy persons" at Communion does not reserve the elements for the good people or Pharisees, but for those for whom Christ has been made righteousness and sanctification, and who have "closed with him." The Scots General Assembly Commission on the Will of God stated: "The Church on earth is a society, not of the just, but of the justified; not of the righteous, but of the forgiven and redeemed."⁶²

It would thus appear that the "multitudinous" and "gathered" Churches tend to draw at different points this line of separation between the holy and all else. The former are content with a credible profession of faith; but the latter exercise their private and group judgment and discriminate "the profane and ungodly multitudes" (to use the phrase of Henry Barrow)⁶³ from the saints, the true believers, those who (as in the policy of one Baptist Church) "afford satisfactory evidence of possessing decided Christian principle by a corresponding Christian conduct and profession."⁶⁴ Gosse's *Father and Son* is a classic in this

connection. John Erskine⁶⁵ in eighteenth-century Scotland was inclined to support the Puritan and sectarian view, asserting that in the parable of the Tares the field is the world and not the Church, and that if hypocrites were there they were "fraudulently sown by the devil," and that the fault was in allowing such a condition of affairs ever to arise. The Church of Scotland for the most part has preferred the institutional to the personal standard. It must, however, be realised that though the extremes are far apart, and though there may be considerable differences of temperament and vocabulary, there is often very little disparity when the actual spiritual facts are examined. In a strict and narrow body young persons grow up, to whom the precision and the anxious self-examination come naturally, and to whom, because they are accustomed to the atmosphere, these in practice mean no more than some apparently much laxer procedure will mean to persons with a different upbringing. As with happiness, so with the spiritual. There is a relativity in the situation which levels out much of the difference when effects are weighed.

The question is: What is a Christian? One feels that in the end the differences in the reply that comes from "multitudinous" and "gathered," institutional and spiritual, respectively, are due rather to difference in the religious language and routine employed, than to any fundamental discrepancy as to the answer. Let us hope that deepening contacts will prove that this particular point of marked divergence among the denominations is after all a difference of emphasis and not of principle.