

ARTICLE II.

RECENT INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE ORGANIZATION OF THE APOSTOLIC AND POST-APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

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THE true theory of Church Polity is a problem which the Providence of God and the course of history seem to present to the Modern Church for solution. The great central doctrines of theology were finally settled long ago, and have received proper expression in the ecumenical symbols. The Greek Church, with its peculiar gift of philosophical thinking and subtlety of distinction, formulated the Christian doctrines of God, the Trinity, and the Person of Christ. The practical sense of the West turned to human life, its needs and sorrows, and the Latin Church expressed for all time what we are to believe concerning sin in man and grace in God. It was reserved for the Germanic Church of the Reformation to set in the foreground, between the Theology of the Greeks and the Anthropology of the Latin, for the first time, the true teaching on Soteriology, or justification by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel of liberty was set forth with great power; the priesthood of all believers was proclaimed in opposition to all papal and hierarchical assumptions; and the rights of the local Church were everywhere recognized. And yet when papal allegiance was denied and the bishops fell, a most alarming gap was left in the social and religious life of Europe. Those were troublous days in which to be left without rules and authority in the house of the Lord. There were Anabaptists and other sectaries, preaching ecclesiastical communism and anarchy. There was persecution from without; there were heretical and schismatic movements within the church. The result was that the Reformers turned to the civil power for help, and put the princes

more or less in the place of the bishops. The polity of the established churches was thus both theoretically and practically very closely associated with the theories and methods of the state. In some cases, such as the Episcopal Church in England, and still more the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and elsewhere, the divine right claimed for the order of church government led to much sharper discussion of the points at issue; but in all these discussions, the presuppositions of a *jus divinum* for the polity upheld prevented any thoroughly historic apprehension of the whole subject. Other churches, born of religious revival, such as the Moravian Brethren in Germany and the Methodists in England, naturally laid such stress upon the new birth, genuine conversion, and a religious life, that they were quite inclined to regard church organization as simply a question of practical expediency, or to work within the framework of the church wherein they were born. This "Pietistic" reaction, both on the Continent and in Britain, is found occupying, in reference to church government, a position of comparative indifference, not very unlike that reached from the opposite direction by Rationalism. In the one case the full blaze of zeal for the salvation of men cast ecclesiastical modes of procedure into the shadow. In the other, amid the calm contemplation of God, virtue and immortality, theories of presbyters or deacons appear to be subjects at best for the free choice of the individual moralist.

When church life was transferred to America, and for the first time Christianity became separated from the state, there was developed a variety and exuberance of religious thought, which long spent much of its force in the most diverse and radical attempts to supply religion with a better expression and more satisfactory method. Such efforts were largely centrifugal, and tended rather toward the disintegration of the prevailing church, and the multiplication of a great number of more or less mutually exclusive conventicles, than toward frequent consideration of the oneness of our holy religion, or of the best mode of organization of the church universal. But the period of centrifugal activity is to a large extent past, and the time of

the centripetal forces has come. Here, perhaps, in the later revelation of Church History, God will again guide his people, as in the former revelation of the Sacred Scriptures, by bringing to pass the proper facts or difficulties in methods, or crisis in life itself, that he may thus prepare the way for the unfolding of the fitting doctrine for such an emergency. One thing seems certain, that a chief characteristic of the Christianity of our day, especially in America, is the tendency, everywhere manifest, towards closer fellowship among Christians, more uniformity in methods of work, a wider sympathy in evangelical teaching, and an evident desire for more corporate union among all who profess and call themselves Christian. Within denominational limits this movement has led up to such associations as the Pan-Presbyterian Council, the Methodist Ecumenical Conference and the American Congress of Churches ; while beyond these narrow boundaries the desire of godly men seems to be more and more searching for some place of substantial unity, where the prayer of the Lord, " that they all may be one," can be realized in a way only dreamed of since the Reformation sacrificed the outward oneness of the Romish system for the inward liberty of the children of God.

If the Spirit of Christ be thus moving among the members of his body, and the truth is to be brought into greater prominence, that, whatever be the theory of the matter, the experimental fact is that in evangelistic work the blessing of God seems to ignore the distinctions of clergy and laity, presbyter and bishop, and moves in free activity wherever the brethren of Christ set forth his love and energy ; if these things be so, a study of the organization of the primitive churches should be of peculiar interest ; for if clear views could be reached respecting the great principles which underlay apostolic methods, which united Jews and Gentiles, which harmonized all the conflicting questions of circumcision and uncircumcision, and kept the middle way between the narrowness of the Mosaic letter and the latitudinarianism of the Gentile Spirit—a spirit which often threatened to evaporate all doctrine in Gnostic fancies—clear views of that elastic yet powerful apostolic system might cer-

tainly go far towards supplying the theory of greater Christian unity, after which we are now seeking.

The consideration of this subject, which is ecclesiastical rather than doctrinal, needs the most careful application of the modern historic method. The judicial spirit must prevail. The testimony of facts and the earliest evidence alone must be heard calmly, regardless of modern usages, personal predilections or denominational consistency. The cultivation of such a spirit of impartial inquiry, and the constant effort to see the past with the eyes of the past, goes far to remove the modern student from the heated air of partisan pleading, and not only puts him in a position to read correctly the records of the early church, but inclines his heart to labor to restore in his own day the better system of which he has learned. To one accustomed to read the popular polemics of denominational controversy, it is most refreshing to turn to the valuable works, which have appeared in recent years, upon the constitutional growth of the apostolic and post-apostolic churches. The investigations of Ritschl, Heinrici, Hatch, Harnack, Lightfoot and others, all breathe a catholicity, freedom from sectarian bias, a painstaking desire simply to reach the truth after exhausting the last receptacle of information, which show utter indifference to any consideration save that of the historic sources and the proper inferences which may be drawn from them. Such inquirers care nothing about the denominational outcome of their studies, whether it be Independency or the Papacy, provided it fairly reflect all the light of the latest knowledge.

And yet there is a preliminary question which the student must often deal with at the very outset ; it is, whether the Bible teaches, by precept or example, any particular system of church polity, which is normative and obligatory for all future church organic life ; whether the way the apostolic churches managed their affairs belongs to Revelation in the same sense as do the doctrinal and ethical precepts ; in a word, whether the Scriptures afford Presbyterianism, Congregationalism or Episcopacy a divine right to be ; or, whether Christ's kingdom on earth has not been left perfectly free within the great limitations of faith

in God, Christ as Supreme Head, holiness of life, and the brotherhood and equality of all believers, to organize for mutual activity, purity and discipline in any way which may commend itself to the mind of the church in view of its circumstances and duties.

The Roman Catholics, most Episcopalians and many Presbyterians—though doubtless in diminishing numbers—hold the former view; the latter opinion is entertained by the German churches, with very few exceptions, and by many theologians in all Protestant communions. The attitude taken in reference to this preliminary inquiry will naturally color more or less the nature and the extent of the investigation into early Church government; for the man who believes that Episcopacy, with its three classes of clergy—bishops, priests, and deacons—was appointed by God, or that the Presbytery, with teaching and ruling elders, is of divine right, must consider questions of ecclesiastical polity as matters of conscience, rooted in the word of God, and to be held even in their details as tenaciously as any other teaching of Scripture; while the student, who regards church organization in its subordinate aspects as but the garments of Christian life, and the apostolic methods in this respect as not binding, except so far as rooted in some great principle of Christianity, any more than the early use of unleavened bread or fermented wine at the Lord's Supper, or reclining at table, or meeting in an upper room—such a student will enter upon this study chiefly as a subject of great antiquarian interest. He may, and doubtless will, be naturally inclined to follow primitive methods here as in matters of worship and evangelization, but his investigation of the whole question is more a matter of critical historic inquiry than of careful New Testament exegesis. Did Christ found a visible society; did He intend that such a society should have a single form of organization, and that such organization should be regarded as part of the essence of a church? The very conservative party says Yes, the more liberal party says No, and argues that Christians had in apostolic days, and still have a free right of association in the name of Christ, and that no usage, apos-

tolic or otherwise, is binding upon the Church for all times. Beyschlag says¹ of this freer view: "A reasonable conception of history would expect, on general principles, that the apostles, far from bringing with them a complete constitution for all future ages, would be led rather, as a rule, only by real pressing requirements to proceed to external organization,² and then would not go beyond the most primitive degree." Kühl, after referring to this remark of Beyschlag, continues, "that is an opinion, which no man will oppose, who really and impartially looks at the outer and inner relations of the primitive Christian churches." He holds (p. 126) that even the Pastoral Epistles, which give us the most advanced type of New Testament church polity, present rules for order in the congregations, which in every case have direct reference to the points at issue in the particular circumstances of the churches addressed, and not to any fixed scheme of Church Constitution. Stanley clears the ground for his Broad Church teaching,³ that whatever is right, by saying: "No existing church can find any pattern or platform of its government in those early times." He declares that the fierce controversy between Presbyterianism and Episcopacy, which raged from the sixteenth to the early part of the nineteenth century, has entirely lost its significance. The only church which Christ described was two or three gathered together in his name. He founded no Christian ministry as we have it. Neither the apostles nor the Seventy had any successors, and the church existed for years after the death of Christ without a separate order of clergy.

All this it is argued, oppose the idea that the Apostolic church had a completed organization, which should be a model for time to come. Ecclesiastical method arose as a growth, and that growth was legitimate, even after apostolic days. The apostles left the church to form its own constitution under the guidance of the Spirit of God, and as circumstances required.

¹ *Die Christliche Gemeindeverfassung im Zeitalter des Neuen Testaments*, a prize essay: Harlem, 1874, p. 58.

² *Die Gemeindeordnung in den Pastoralbriefen*: Berlin, 1885, p. 1.

³ *Christian Institutions*. Third edition: London, 1882, p. 188.

Morris, a liberal, conservative Presbyterian, thinks that the true position is "that any polity is legitimate, which stands substantially on Biblical foundation, and which justifies itself practically in the judgment and experience of the household of faith."⁴ These biblical foundations seem to be generally understood as almost not broader than those general principles of ecclesiastical privileges, discipline, and method, which are common to all evangelical Protestant churches. The practical Christian comity of our day, at all events, proceeds upon that assumption. Prominent and learned ministers pass from the Congregational to the Presbyterian, or from the Methodist to the Congregational church without any questions being asked about their change of view on ecclesiastical polity, or any insinuation of insincerity being uttered. At a recent meeting of prominent clergymen in New York, the majority being Presbyterian, the general opinion expressed on this subject, it is said, was that church polity is simply a matter of Christian expediency, or convenience. Now if this or that form of church government is a matter of mere expediency, and not a question of Bible teaching and conscience for the individual clergyman, it will not be long before whole churches may regard their differences of polity as simple questions of convenience, and matters which might well be given up for the sake of larger oneness and increased efficiency.

It is along the line of this more liberal view that all recent research has run. It finds that no modern church system exactly reproduces that of the New Testament, for it was a growth so natural and so wedded to the peculiar circumstances amid which it arose that its exact reduplication would be impracticable and unwise; but it also finds that the ecclesiastical methods of early days were so liberal, so full of the spirit of Christ, so very brotherly and human that a clear, consistent historic apprehension of them might well lead to a similar restoration of church unity of organization in these last times.

⁴ *Ecclesiology*, New York, 1885, p. 139.

I.

THE VIEW THAT THE ORGANIZATION OF THE EARLY CHURCHES WAS
DRAWN ESSENTIALLY FROM JEWISH SOURCES.

Since the famous work of Vitringa on the ancient synagogue, the usual explanation of the rise of church polity in apostolic days has been that the early disciples simply organized for purposes of worship and discipline after the plan so familiar to them in the synagogue service. Every Jewish village had a band of elders, the 'sheikhs,' who were not only civil magistrates, but also ecclesiastical judges. They met twice a week in the synagogue, and tried all cases of discipline; for the law of Moses was the law of God, and under the theocracy church and state were one. The congregation might assemble and hear the trial but no popular vote was taken, as we find to these elders belonged also the general control and guidance of the affairs of the synagogue later in the apostolic churches.

Coming to the more immediate duties of the Synagogue, we find these in the hand of a leading official, called the *ἀρχισυνάγωγος*. He was usually chosen from the elders, but was not identical with them. His peculiar task was to take charge of public worship and see that everything was done decently and in order. Such a presiding officer was the more important because the exercises of the synagogue service were performed entirely by laymen, volunteers from the congregation. The reading of Scripture, the public prayers, the addresses, might be undertaken by any one who felt qualified for the duty.

Lower officials were the almoners, two of whom received the offerings of the people and three distributed the alms to the needy, and the Chazzan or *ὀνηρέτης*, who acted as sexton, brought the roll of the law, took charge of the building, and taught the village school.

Within that simple framework the first believers grouped themselves, accepting the Messiah promised to their fathers. The college of presbyters in the synagogue was the forerunner of the band of elders in the Christian church, hence there is no mention in the acts of the origin of such an office. The

Christian deacon is the chazzar or the almoner of the Jewish congregation, performing his duties in the wider charity of the new brotherhood. James describes (Chap. ii. 2) the meeting of believers as a synagogue, and everywhere the methods of Christian worship—one having a psalm, another a doctrine, a third a tongue, a revelation or an interpretation (I Cor. xiv. 26) show the same free edification that was customary in the Jewish church. Hence it was inferred that the brethren in Jerusalem, when the time came for separate existence, organized on the model of the synagogue. This system was adopted by the Gentile churches imitating the mother church in Jerusalem; and so, along the lines of the eldership, the ruling and teaching office, and of the diaconate, the ministering and benevolent office, the essential feature of the Jewish polity became universal. A little later, the president of the council of elders became the early bishop. James, the brother of the Lord, the leader among the Christian presbyters in Jerusalem, was the first such congregational bishop. Lightfoot thinks⁴ that the persecution of the primitive Church hastened its independent organization. When James was put to death and the apostles were about to leave Jerusalem, he supposes, they settled the Synagogue government upon the Church for its permanent direction. In that government, however, he admits that “the diaconate was an entirely new creation,” while the office of bishop, which appears in a very rudimentary form in Jerusalem, was unknown as late as A. D. 70 among the Gentile churches. The view of Rothe, that after the fall of Jerusalem, the apostles and first teachers met to provide for the crisis upon them, and as the result of their deliberation established the Episcopal form of church government, Lightfoot cannot accept. But he thinks the fact that the bishopric appears early in the second century in Asia Minor and elsewhere, shows that John must have occupied a position in Ephesus similar to that of James in Jerusalem, and that Jewish influences may be traced through the whole Church in the matter of organization. Weizsäcker says⁵ that all we

⁴ Commentary on Philippians: London, 1868, p. 191.

⁵ *Das apostolische Zeitalter der Christlichen Kirche*: Freiburg, I. B., 1886, p. 629.

can know of the Church in Jerusalem is that the congregation there was for a long time directed in a free way by the apostles, then by James, the brother of the Lord; but of an eldership representing the Church we have no sufficient proof. He thinks, however, that there is no doubt but that the Jewish Christian congregation which left Jerusalem during the war with Rome, had adopted an eldership constitution, just as the Jews in the Diaspora had done.

Recent investigation, however, has so greatly modified these positions, or so utterly rejected much that is essential in them, that Kurtz does not hesitate to call⁶ the synagogue theory obsolete. Not only is it hard to show that the Gentile churches adopted the Jewish forms, but it is very difficult to connect the churches in Palestine with the well-known methods of the synagogue. He says neither the *ἀρχισυνάγωγος* nor the *ἐπιτρόπος*, characteristic officers in the Jewish society, is reproduced in the Christian congregation. On the other hand, the first officers, if we may so distinguish them, who appear in the Christian brotherhood, those who had charge of the alms, and the next officials who arise, the *πρεσβύτεροι*, who formed a council with the Apostles in guiding the congregation, have no counterparts in the synagogue, for the "presbyters of the people" (Matt. xxi. 23; Acts iv. 5), are not officers of a local synagogue, congregational officers of guidance and discipline, but are the high priests and elders, who constituted the sanhedrim, and who legislated for the whole nation. To this must be added the difference, already referred to, that these elders of the people acted for the people without asking the opinion of those whom they represented, but, in the Christian society, when any important matter came up for consideration all believers were consulted and helped to reach the best conclusion. The single official term elder is the most striking point of ecclesiastical connection between the Jewish and the Christian system of polity; and yet just here, when we compare what the elders were and did in the synagogue with what they were and did in the church, the

⁶ *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte*, 9te Aufl., Leipzig, 1885, p. 41f.

difference is very evident. Kühl argues⁷ in this connection that the functions of these officers were, in the Jewish society, of an external nature. The elders there acted as councilors, watched over the outer order of the congregation, exercised discipline and performed the duties of a local court. They had nothing to do with money matters; neither did they take any part in public worship and teaching. The duties of the Christian elders, on the contrary, were more internal. Even in the Jewish churches their labor was never that of the synagogue elders. They were everywhere spiritual officers, caring for the souls of the people. This is still more evident in the Gentile churches, for they were loosely attached to the synagogue and regarded it as on a level with all other religious societies. This is inferred not merely from the strong opposition to Judaism which even Paul manifests (I. Thess. ii. 14-16), and the evident difference which prevailed between the Pauline and the Petrine communities, but also from the fact, which Schürer especially has recently set forth⁸ from inscription sources, that even the synagogues in the Diaspora did not follow closely the methods of their Palestinian brethren. In Rome they were modeled rather upon the religious and social clubs than upon the traditional system of organization. As a matter of fact, the term *πρεσβύτερος* does not occur in the Greek synagogues; the name, *ἀρχων*, borrowed apparently from the heathen society, taking its place. The presbyters in the Gentile churches, Kühl continues, had an office, which corresponded more closely to that of the *ἀρχισυνάγωγος*, the spiritual leader of the synagogue, than to the work of the board of elders.

And so Hadrian thought, for, in his letter to Servianus, he says, *Nemo archisynagogus Judæarum . . . nemo Christianorum presbyter*, etc., apparently regarding them as occupying corresponding offices. This whole course of reasoning, it will be seen, proceeds on the ground that while we find abundant evidence of both Jewish elders and Christian elders, the latter must not be

⁷ *Die Gemeindeordnung in den Pastoralbriefen*, Berlin, 1885, p. 115.

⁸ *Die Gemeindeverfassung der Juden in Rom in der Kaiserzeit*, Leipzig, 1879.

considered as an imitation of the former, because when their position and duties are examined they are found to be too dissimilar to be the result of such a process. That there was a great difference in the functions of these two kinds of elders, must be admitted; for, even if we grant with Weizsäcker⁹ that the elders with the Apostles formed a council analogous to the sanhedrim, which consisted of the chief priests and the presbyters, and that this Christian sanhedrim passed measures for the Church universal, we are still left in the dark as to how a college of elders arose as the officers of the local congregation, and performing, as James himself indicates (v. 14), spiritual and pastoral functions. Doubtless, the study and fellowship of the risen Christ in the Christian meeting, instead of the teaching of the law in the Jewish gathering, the centering of the worship of the temple more and more in the meetings of the brotherhood, and the apprehension of the Church as a nursery and mission agency for the kingdom of God on earth, may have largely helped to give us the Christian officer with the familiar Jewish name. And yet it is just in so formal a matter as church polity that spiritual influences would be least potent, and direct imitation could be most readily traced.

In the Acts of the Apostles we find Paul appointing elders in every city to take the oversight and feed the flock. This evidence points so strongly towards the Jewish system, taken in connection with what is found in the Pastoral Epistles, that Heinrici says¹⁰ if these writings are accepted as authoritative for Paul's actions, then it must be admitted that he carried the synagogue practices into his church organization. But when we look at the actual working of church life in the Gentile congregations, there is found such a liberty and such a different spirit that it is very hard to believe there is more than a mere verbal connection with Judaism. Heinrici urges that the teaching of Paul was contrary throughout to that of the synagogue. There is no mention of presbyters in Corinth. Cunningham

⁹ *Das Apostolische Zeitalter der Christlichen Kirche*, Freiburg, I. B., 1886, p. 627.

¹⁰ *Die Christengemeinden Korinths und die religiösen Genossenschaften der Griechen*, in *Zeitschrift für wiss. Theologie*, 1876, pp. 465-526.

even notes¹¹ that the Church here was "almost structureless—little more than an aggregate of individuals—with no bishop, presbyter or deacon." The disorders mentioned (1 Cor. xi. 12-14) could not have taken place in a meeting organized like a synagogue. Paul always leaves the Church in Corinth free to act on his proposals; he addresses no officials; he makes no reference to Jewish usages. Everywhere the congregation is independent, autonomous and self-deciding. The same absence of governing officials is seen in the public worship. The sacred day seems to be Sunday. Heathen excess is warned against. The position of women and of slaves shows a state of indecision still, and a lack of regular officers. And yet the Church had orderly arrangements—for the *ἀγάπη*, for discipline, for collections, etc.—and was led by men peculiarly gifted by the Holy Ghost and prominent in good works.

Kühl urges further against the Jewish origin of the early Church polity the fact, that the deacon, an officer peculiar to Christians, cannot possibly be traced to the *ὑπηρέτης* of the synagogue; for this latter was merely an official of worship, while the former was active in the whole benevolent life of the congregation. The deacons were not servants, but were peculiarly endowed men, who had received a special *χάρισμα* for their work.

Neither can the title *ἐπίσκοπος*, the first distinctively Christian technical term for an official in a Gentile church which we meet (Phil. i, 1), have come from the synagogue. Women, also, had no official position in the Jewish church, but among the Christians we find them in the office of deaconess, perhaps even of presbyter. These considerations have convinced Otto Ritschl that Kühl is right in holding that the Christian elder is not borrowed from the Jewish.¹² They are certainly fitted to make us reserve our judgment, and hear more impartially the evidence which other investigators bring forward for an entirely different origin of the organization of the early churches.

¹¹ *The Growth of the Church*, London, 1886, p. 18.

¹² *Theologische Literaturzeitung*, 1885, No. 25.

II.

THE VIEW THAT THE ORGANIZATION OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCHES WAS DRAWN ESSENTIALLY FROM FORMS OF ASSOCIATION ALREADY EXISTING IN THE GREEK AND ROMAN SOCIAL SYSTEM.

Good old Eusebius suggested long ago that as the Jewish people prepared a religion for the world, so the Greeks prepared the world for that religion. The Christian Revelation came through Israel, but meeting the terrible opposition of Judaistic bigotry, soon moved along the line of less resistance and struck its deepest roots in Gentile soil. At first the believers, both Greeks and Jews, came out from the world and were separate, not only in their holiness of life, but largely also in their social connections, their amusements, their employments and their external relation to the Pagan empire.

But such separation was not so extreme in the first Christian century as is very often supposed. By the middle of the second century a crisis had come, when the Church was called to face the problem: Shall we separate ourselves from our fellow citizens, refuse to enter the army, act as officials or engage in the usual occupations, and shall we preserve our faith by forming an exclusive circle, a little kingdom within the empire; or, shall we enter all the avenues of honorable civil and social life, and make Christianity a power for holiness along all the lines of national activity? The Montanists declared for the first course, the Church pronounced for the second. The fact that this question arose in such an acute form so early, shows that even within the apostolic century, and while the primitive church organization was still taking shape, the early believers had not assumed a hostile attitude towards the general social system of the Greek and Roman world. Recent studies into the beginning of Christian art have now made evident that the artists of the catacombs followed sympathetically the heathen masters who were round about them. It is but another step in this same direction to inquire how the external forms of the Christian society stood related, in those early formative days, to the other societies which existed in the empire. The apostle Paul taught that the

Roman power, with its grand municipal system, was ordained of God. The divine establishment of civil society has been emphasized ever since the Reformation, as agreeable to the Scriptures and supported by the history of the race. It cannot, therefore, be considered, in the nature of the case, anything strange or radically inconsistent with Christianity to ask whether the early Church did not borrow its methods of organization from the social life of the Roman world, rather than from the synagogue system of the Jews. The methods of the rabbis and elders in Jerusalem have no greater claim to be ordained of God than have the business methods of the Greek municipalities. Both were of historic national growth; and the relations of both to the early Christian societies can be satisfactorily apprehended only from the point of view of historic sociology.

As long ago as 1843 Mommsen published his book, *De Collegiis et Sodalitiis Romanorum*, in which he turned attention to the club life of the Roman Empire and showed how widespread it was in the time of the apostles and later. In 1873 Foucart's work, *Les Associations Religieuses chez les Grecs*, etc., appeared, and gave a full account, including valuable information from inscriptions, of these societies. Other writers followed¹³ until this phase of the life of the ancients came into much clearer light and prominence. Then Heinrici undertook to show what similarity there was between these secular and religious societies in the Gentile world and the Christian society which was organized by the apostles and evangelists.¹⁴ The first century, we are told, resembled the nineteenth in a common tendency towards the formation of associations. The Roman Empire, when Christianity appeared, was "honeycombed" with literary societies, theatrical societies, athletic clubs, benevolent associations, mutual insurance companies, and every sort of social and religious societies. Cæsar and Augustus had abolished political clubs, but allowed under severe surveillance a great number of other societies to exist. These now became the home of,

¹³ Cf. Kuhl, l. c. p. 109.

¹⁴ *Zeitschrift für wiss. Theologie*, 1876, S. 465-526; 1877, S. 89-130. *Studien und Kritiken*, 1881, S. 504ff.

free thought, of social intercourse, and, most valuable of all, of a limited religious liberty. It was a very important thing that such gatherings had the right of legal existence, the right to make contracts, hold property, and, more or less, to exercise jurisdiction over their own members. Oriental religious societies appear in Greece as early as the Peloponnesian war, but did not become widespread until after the time of Alexander the Great. Eastern merchants in the west, like the Jews in the Diaspora, formed societies for the worship of their own gods. Slaves torn from home took their religion with them. The great blending of nationalities everywhere in the empire dotted the earth with societies devoted to some strange worship. Wandering priests abounded, going from land to land teaching the mysteries of strange cults. In the corrupt and formal condition of the Roman world such meeting-places of congenial spirits—Greeks with Greeks, Egyptians with Egyptians, craftsmen with fellow craftsmen, slaves with other slaves, or the various members of a large family connection assembling here—were as an oasis in the desert of a far-reaching despotism. For the poor, especially, such gatherings offered relief and comfort. The *collegia tenuiorum* were granted special privileges by law, and the slave, with consent of his master, might join such clubs. Here, at least, he was treated as a man. Here he found brothers. Here pledges were given of mutual aid. Here festal banquets were given, like spots of light in a life otherwise very dreary and dark. Here was provision for a decent burial at death. And here were taught mysteries which often whispered to the weary soul of a peace and joy unknown on earth. Such a *collegium* might consist of only three members, just as Tertullian, speaking of the church, said *et ubi tres, ecclesia est, licet, laici*; while there were also societies so large that the members formed several denominations. These last were frequently named from different persons.¹⁵ Schürer tells us that the synagogues in

¹⁵For example, from benefactors, as "The *cultores* of the statues and shields of L. Abullus Dexter," or "The club which is in the house of Sergia Paulina," a real club of Pagan slaves in A. D. 168. Cf. *Roma Sotterranea*, by Northcote and Brownlow; new edition, 1879, Vol. I., p. 64ff.

Rome were designated in the same way, *e. g.*, the Augustus synagogue, the Agrippa synagogue, etc. Perhaps the parties in Corinth, named after Paul and Apollos and Christ, form a parallel case. Lists of members were carefully kept, as twenty-four males and three females in one club. The rich societies owned land, on which they erected a club house for their meetings. They built also a temple for their presiding deity and dwellings for the officials—all being surrounded by a wall. Before the temple was planted a grove, very like the surroundings of eastern churches and monasteries. The poorer societies met in a hall or school-room, *schola*. The constitution of these societies, which it should be remembered were all more or less religious, being under some god or genius, embraced certain general principles. First of all, the common good of the members was ever to be kept in view. The door of admission was open to all, but the knowledge of the mysteries was reserved for the initiated. Every member had equal rights in the general benevolence, in the exercise of discipline, in making rules, in receiving new members, and in attendance upon the usual exoteric exercises: but the religious secrets, the esoteric teachings, were only for the elect few. There was the general society, and there was what might be called the church, which alone partook of the sacraments. There was the open hall or lodge-room for the common meeting, but there was at one end a chapel or *templum* for the presiding deity; or, if there was no chapel, there was some place for an altar or symbol of the god, around which the higher hopes of the initiated clustered. Under the principle of the common good, the individual member in these societies was bound to be subject to the will of the whole. Disturbance of the peace could be punished by fine, by loss of privileges, or by exclusion from the club. But within these general rules there was great freedom. Here free men and slaves, men and women, natives and foreigners, met. Here was a brotherhood that overleaped all distinctions, and here were suggestions of a faith broad and catholic. The terminology of the constitution of these societies was borrowed from civil life. The term *ἀρχων*, for one official, points to

Athenian municipal usage. Decisions were called *ψηφίσματα*; the law, *νόμος*; the whole society appears as *τὸ κοινόν*, also as *σύννοδος* or *ἱερά σύννοδος*, as *ἐκκλησία* and *συναγωγή*. Official meetings were held once a month, at which all the members might speak and vote. The conduct of the meetings was in the hands of the officers. These officials were, first of all, the presidents or overseers, called *ἐπιμεληταί*, *προστάται*, *συναγωγοί*, etc.; next, the *ἱεροποιοί*, then the secretary and treasurer. We hear also of *σύνδικοι*, *λογισταί* and *ἐπίσκοποι*. Not many societies, however, needed so many officials. The officers were usually chosen for one year, though they might be reëlected or even appointed for life. Faithful officers were rewarded to encourage them. This was done by public thanks or by testimonials, such as a crown of olive or even of gold. In the fulfillment of duty disinterestedness and unselfishness were especially praised.

The conditions of admission to the society were a promise of chastity, piety and goodness, though in practice these were frequently neglected. The candidates were examined by the president, the *ἀρχιερμανιστής* and the secretary. These things indicate the ideal aim present more or less in all such clubs; but it must be added that while in some cases these meetings promoted righteousness and temperance, in others they but lent the veil of secrecy to festering uncleanness. All the members paid a monthly fee,¹⁶ which was remitted, however, in the case of sickness or bereavement. Those in arrears paid double; there were fines also for neglect of duty. In the worst societies the idea of mutual aid was ever prominent, and in many cases, especially in the west, the important matter of decent burial formed the central feature. There were many *collegia funera-ticia*, in which the hope of being buried as a man enabled the oppressed and the slave to endure the life of a beast; for when Christianity entered the Roman Empire, the condition of pauperism and wretchedness was such as perhaps the sun never before or since shone upon. The cries "Girl, bread and

¹⁶There was an entrance fee of about four dollars; the monthly dues were about ten cents per member.

games," or "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," shows the answer then given to the question, Is life worth living?

In such an empire of wrong and outrage these numerous clubs formed a very important factor; for, in them society corrected the injustice of its own institutions: here, at least, men might meet as brothers.

The conditions amid which religious societies arose in the Roman world were essentially the same in Italy, Greece and Asia Minor, for Roman law was authority in the municipal towns of the empire. And yet local influences gave a strong coloring to the mode of organization. Hence, it followed that the Greek societies were more republican in their character, and perhaps more distinctly religious. In the west they sank more into burial guilds, whose number was very great in comparison with the purely religious societies. But everywhere these associations had two important rights granted them: (1) freedom of worship, and (2) jurisdiction, within certain limits, over their members. They differed from the *sacerdotia publica* chiefly in this, that, though recognized by the state, they were not supported at the public expense, but must rely upon the free will offerings of their members. They differed also in another important respect: they were not only private in their character, but they might limit their membership to a family circle, and a man's home might be made the centre of a so-called burial club, with some officially recognized name, under cover of which household customs and religion might enjoy a liberty not otherwise tolerated. There were numerous meetings to celebrate the virtues of the dead; the anniversary of the founder of the society, his father, his brothers, the festival day of the patron and of other benefactors, as well as of ordinary members. At every such gathering addresses might be made, songs sung and prayers offered to the tutelary deity. Hence, those of the household of Aristobulus and of Narcissus in Rome (Rom. xvi. 11, 12), or the first fruits of Achaia, the house of Stephanas (1 Cor. xvi. 15), in Corinth, when they met to celebrate the death of Christ, by their solemn supper,

had but a short step to take in order to put their domestic religious exercises under the shield of the Roman law relating to clubs. We hear of burial societies first in the time of Nerva, but it is highly probable that they existed considerably earlier. They are especially mentioned in the second century, because the suppression of most other *collegia* caused them rapidly to increase.

We now turn to the Christian society and its formal relation to the religious societies so wide-spread in the Greek and Roman world when it appeared. Heinrici, whom we have followed in the main in our account of the Pagan clubs, goes on to say that he thinks these associations, in their common life and constitutions, were the model, more than any other, on which the polity of the Greek churches was formed. Taking the Church in Corinth, planted by Paul, and led by him for nearly two years, a striking parallel is found between its organization and that of the *θίασοι* or *ἐπάροι*, as the Greek religious societies were called. The church here formed an independent body, with its faith and sacraments as its mystery. It met at appointed times, and in an appointed place; perhaps in a *schola*, as we find used in Ephesus (Acts xix. 9). It had common festal meals—the *ἀγῶνη*—which were very popular, probably because so well known in the heathen societies. Such feasts in the clubs were held very largely in commemoration of the death of members. It is not impossible that there was a similar association of ideas in Corinth, where a feast was connected with the Lord's Supper. The expenses of the church were paid by the members, unless some one was able to meet them. Each contributed to the common meal, which was a sort of picnic in church, to which each brought his basket (cf. 1 Cor. xi. 20), just as the societies did. There were also free will offerings, such as were greatly praised in the Greek societies. Difficulties in the church were settled by the church. The officers were freely chosen. The society could form different sections without losing its unity. Most of the members belonged to the lower classes. The church was open to all, Jew and Greek, barbarian and Scythian, bond and free; but the onlookers occupied a separate place (1 Cor. xiv. 16), as

was apparently the case in the heathen clubs. The irregularities, too, in the Church of Corinth are analogous to those of the Greek societies.

The moral laxity, which Paul reproves, and the excesses at suppers, point towards just the two weak spots in the life of the heathen clubs. The meetings for edification, with their divisions, look towards the same thing in the secular societies. In the Corinthian church we see women claiming all the privileges of men, just as was done in the *θιασοι*. The references to the officers seem to bear out the similarity, for Paul uses *προϊστάμενος* (1 Thess. v. 12; Rom. xii. 8), of a presiding officer, and *προσάτις* of Phœbe, in a way that reminds us of the usage in the societies. Hence, Heinrici concludes that the Greek church in Corinth was organized on the general methods of the heathen clubs.

Christianity went to the west as an Oriental religion, and naturally assumed the same form there. At first we do not hear of its independent existence, for it was regarded as part of Judaism. But when Nero proceeded against it, and later emperors are called to notice it, the law which is invoked against the church is the ordinance against illegal *collegia*. Pliny, in his famous epistle to Trajan, written about forty years after the death of Paul, distinctly regards the churches of Bithynia as such societies (*hæterias esse vetueram*). They had a common meal which Pliny regarded as a society festival and commanded them to discontinue. Lucian also speaks of the Christian leader as *θιασάρχης*, and *προσάτης*, the usual designations of a club president.¹⁷ Celsus calls (Origen *Cont. Cels.* iii. 22), the disciples *θιασῶται*, or members of a religious club, of which Jesus was president. The Christians did not use such terms, yet Origen does not reject them as inappropriate. Eusebius, on the other hand, calls church members *θιασῶται*. A similar borrowing of a name from heathen officials has been found in an epitaph of North Africa—*flamen perpetuus christianus*. Especially strong are the words of Tertullian (Apology, chap. xxxviii-xxxix) in his defence of the Christians. His argument is that the churches

¹⁷In his Dialogue Peregrinus, § 12.

should be regarded as among the legal societies (*inter licitas factiones*). He describes Christians as a body united together by a common religion, by a divine discipline, and by a covenant hope—very similar to the language of the clubs. He refers frequently to the common meal, which rendered them an object of suspicion. He speaks of the monthly offering and of the common treasury. The practical work of the church was “to nourish and to bury the poor, and to provide for poor children and orphans.” The presiding officers were “*probati seniores*, who received that honor not by purchase but by a good testimony.” All of which certainly presents not a few points of striking similarity between the heathen societies and the Christian societies in the Græco-Roman world. The only other point to be noticed is the attitude of the Imperial government towards such clubs in the early days of Christianity. Heinrici says that such a society was regarded by the law as a legal person and recognized usually by a special statute, which made it a *collegium licitum*, and its members within the *collegium* completely independent of the state, so long as not dangerous to it. But not a few societies arose without state notice and were winked at unless really threatening. Thus the *tenuiores* had a general concession to hold societies in Italy and the provinces, though such unauthorized meetings ran the risk of being dissolved by the authorities at any time. Under this class came the early church, which arose in the time of ferment between the old republic and the new empire. The groups of believers meeting in private houses or in a lecture-room appeared to men just like other eastern religious societies. Hence it was very natural that Pliny, Celsus and Lucian should speak of them as they did. But it was equally natural that the Christians themselves should not only adopt a form of organization most familiar to all Roman citizens, and the one which would readily suggest itself, but also that in the use of such an organization they should, as far as they consistently could, make it conform outwardly to the religious societies which were tolerated in the empire.

In respect to the first, Heinrici holds that Paul rested content with the conversion of men, gathered them into little conven-

ticles for prayer and mutual edification, but left all further organization to the spiritual sense and Christian prudence of the brotherhood. He thinks two elements were operative in giving organic shape to this free early assemblage of converts. The first was the patriarchal or family principle, which would group the younger and the less experienced about the older and wiser men. The second was the republican factor in Greek society, which appeared in the municipal institutions, and, in a form more nearly allied to the Christian church, in the Greek religious societies. Paul did not use these forms, but he made them subservient, for his teaching was utterly different from that of the societies. Holsten objects¹⁸ to this view of Heinrici, that it makes Paul "use the forms of life of a religious society of demons." He admits at the same time that the Corinthian church did not organize after the method of the synagogue, but rather that the Greek believers would greatly tend to bring the congregation itself under the point of view of a cultus society. The only contact, however, in form which he finds between the church and the heathen clubs consists in their both meeting at a common place for purposes of religion. All the rest—equal privileges of members, Jews and Greeks, free and slaves, etc., the judicial powers of the church, the service of each for all, etc.—he considers a result of the peculiar principles of Paul. Weizsäcker takes somewhat similar ground.¹⁹ He says there was undoubtedly some personal service in the Pauline churches; but what that was can hardly be gathered from the analogy of the Greek associations, though he does not doubt that these societies helped the congregation to an external existence. The church polity in general, however, must have arisen rather from the particular needs of the Christian brotherhood. He recognizes the points of resemblance between the heathen religious societies and the Christian religious societies, but lays stress upon the difference between them, not only in the utterly different cultus, but in the infinitely further-going ethical and social aims of Christianity. The worship here is a constant

¹⁸ *Das Evangelium des Paulus*, Bd. I., Berlin, 1880.

¹⁹ *Das Apostolische Zeitalter*, 1886, p. 630.

spiritual intercourse, and the aim of the society is to embrace the whole life of its members. Heinrici, in reply to Holsten, says that he never intended to teach that Paul poured his new wine into the old bottles of Greek societies; neither does he hold that we are simply to put the Greek society model in place of the Jewish synagogue model. What he seeks to do is "from the forms of life in which, during the first years of Christianity, the religious and social interests of the subject classes of the people in the Roman Empire were organized, to gain a fuller historic understanding for the beginnings of the Pauline churches, and thereby, at the same time, to set aside the traditional theory that the constitution of the churches had its authoritative pattern in the synagogue system."²⁰ He seeks to apprehend the genesis of this early church polity from the long neglected point of view of comparative sociology, and sums up his position thus: "My conclusions simply maintain this, that out of the very nature and necessities of historic relations there arose certain forms of religious associations, and that these forms appear also in the Pauline churches." He maintains that the creative idea of Christianity might use Greek methods of work for its high purpose just as well as it used the Greek language. Guided by the spirit of unity, every congregation as a church of God, bound together by allegiance to one Lord (I. Cor. i. 2), and under the general guidance of the Apostles, had the right to arrange the outer forms of life according to its needs. He concedes the great difference between the spirit of the club and the spirit of the church. The *διακονία* and the *διακονεῖν*, which were to be recognized, the *κοπιᾶν*, which was so praiseworthy, find no counterpart in the heathen society. But, on the other hand, the faults of the church, the *φιλοτιμία*, *ζήλος*, *ἔπαινος ἐξ ἀνθρώπων* (I. Cor. iv. 5; II. Cor. viii. 18), are just the failings found fostered in the clubs. He appeals to the most characteristic expression of Paul in reference to the church—many one body in Christ—and claims for it the parentage of the Greek society. Not only was the family idea

²⁰ *Studien und Kritiken*, 1881, p. 509.

familiar in those associations and the term *ἀδελθοί* common in the *collegia*, but such phrases as *corpus collegii*, *corporati*, etc., belonged to the same language. Underlying all this similarity, of course, is the deeper place of unity, the common national and human life out of which all such relations spring.

We now turn for a moment to the other phase of the question, the relation of the religious societies, and, *ex hypothesi*, of the Christian churches to the Roman authorities. If the Society of Jesus were regarded as legally similar to the Society of Augustus or the Society of Isis, then it might come within the general toleration granted to such religious associations. The indications are that the Christian meetings were so considered, and that they strove for the sake of safety and compliance with the law to make the resemblance as great as they honestly could. Tertullian denounced the church for escaping martyrdom by payment of a tax to secure liberty for the sect. (*De Fuga in Persec.*, cc. xii. xiii.) The Romans hated to interfere anywhere with men's gods, and so, especially in the provinces, where republican ideas were more abroad, the Christian societies had more freedom. Yet even here Pliny was obliged to mildly interfere, whereupon the church gave up its common weal and sought to keep within the limits of the legal societies. In Rome, however, the ancient deities alone must be worshipped, and here the Christian gatherings were more suspected and watched. If they were to get within the protection of the law it must now be by appealing to the authorities as did the *collegia tenuiorum*, which were allowed to meet to help the wretched and bury their dead. And this we are now learning was just what the Christians very likely did. They organized in such a way as to appear to the Roman officials as a burial club, and their religious meetings were to be connected more or less with funeral and memorial services for the dead. Baldwin Brown says:²¹ "It is a fact rendered certain by the investigations of the last twenty years, that the whole procedure of these funeral colleges, with their contributions, their lodges, their *cellae*, their

²¹ *From Schola to Cathedral*, Edinburgh; 1886, p. 20.

meetings, and their burial and memorial feasts, was closely copied, with certain obvious modifications, by the Christians, and it was largely through their adoption of these well-understood and respected customs that they were enabled to hold their meetings and keep together as a corporate body through the stormy times of the second and third centuries."

A valuable corroboration of the intimate relation suggested, between the Christian and the heathen societies, has been given by K. Lange,²² and is enforced by Baldwin Brown. It is found in the "sure and incontestible fact" that the earliest Christian basilica was simply a *schola* or club room, such as was occupied by the Pagan associations. As soon as the first believers gathered in a regular way they had a meeting-house of their own. Lange maintains that even in the Apostolic time worship in private houses was not customary, but the church met in its lecture room, an oblong structure with an apse, where the ordinary brethren occupied the general part of the building, while the *πρεσβύτεροι*, a well-known class in both the *collegia* and the synagogue, took their places in the semi-circular apse, with the president or bishop in their midst. Thus both the history of ancient social relations and the history of early architecture conspire to bring Christian church and Pagan club into most intimate external relations.

This is the view set forth with great wealth of learning by De Rossi, the most distinguished of living Christian archæologists. This is also the view which Schürer's study of the contemporaneous organization of the Jews in Rome makes the most probable.²³ Josephus had called²⁴ the meetings of Israel in the Diaspora *θιάσους*, and recent information, gathered chiefly from inscriptions, shows that in the capital of the empire the synagogues decided to organize after the methods of the heathen clubs. That was the form in which they could claim a legal right of existence. These Jewish epitaphs even avoided the Hebrew language. They are written in Greek usually, a

²² *Haus und Halle*, Leipzig, 1885, p. 270ff.

²³ *Die Gemeindeverfassung der Juden in Rom in der Kaiserzeit*, Leipzig, 1879. †

²⁴ *Antiq.* xiv. 10, 8.

few in Latin, and here and there some Hebrew word, such as *Shâlom*, is added. From these inscriptions we learn that the Jews in Rome had a great number of independent congregations, each having its own place of meeting, its own *γερουσία*, or managing council, and its own congregational officers. There is not the least trace of any general council for the Jews of Rome, for such was not possible in the capital of the Pagan empire. Only single societies, such as were familiar to the Romans, would be tolerated. These Jewish congregations had their own particular burial places, around which their religious life clustered, and in which we find the instructive epitaphs referred to. From these we learn that every synagogue in Rome had its own *γερουσία*, with a *γερουσιάρχης* at its head. But it is remarkable, as we have already noticed, that in all the inscriptions there is no mention made of a *πρεσβύτερος*. The reason which Schürer gives is that the presbyters, members of the *γερουσία*, were not officials, and were so numerous that they are not particularly noticed. A class of officers distinctly mentioned, however, were the *ἀρχοντες*. They formed the executive committee of the *γερουσία*, and show that the Jewish congregations in Rome were modeled essentially after the Greek municipalities. The *γερουσιάρχης*, who was *primus inter pares* among the *archons*, and the *αρχισυνάγωγος* were more important officers than the *archon*. The *archontes*, like the society officers in the empire, were chosen for a definite term, though cases of election for life also appear. A further step towards an aristocratic system was the election of minors to the office of *ἀρχων*, a thing which was also done in Roman municipal life. The special oversight of public worship, in Rome, as in Jerusalem, was in the hands of the *ἀρχισυνάγωγος*. This office was different from that of the *ἀρχων*, and was also a different class from the position of presbyter. Besides the well-known *ἐπηρέτης*, we hear, further, of fathers and mothers of the synagogue. These were not officials, but persons held in especial honor, just as *pater et mater collegii* were titles of respect in the heathen societies. We meet also *ὁ προστάτης*,

the president or patron of the club transferred to the synagogue; for besides the president of such societies they had also their patrons. It will be seen from this outline how similar the synagogue organization in Rome was to that of the well-known *collegia*. Weizsäcker, in touching upon this topic, even broadens the term *πρεσβύτερος* and makes it include a class of men in the heathen societies. He says that in the *θίασοι* the full members formed a class distinguished as *οἱ πρεσβύτεροι*, while the uninitiated were known as *οἱ νεανίσχοι*. In both society and synagogue the *ἀρχων* was chosen from this body of elderly men called *πρεσβύτεροι*. Schürer goes still further, and thinks that the hellenizing influence had reached even the great sanhedrim in Jerusalem. He considers the *πρῶτοι δέκα* in that venerable court (Joseph Ant. xx. 8, 11), as nothing else but the *δεκάπρωτοι* of the Greek municipalities.

[*Concluded in the next number.*]